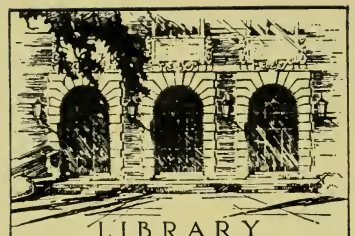

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MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES.

VOL. III.

MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES

BY

LADY BLAKE

AUTHOR OF

"CLAUDE," "HELEN'S FIRST LOVE,"
"THE HISTORY OF A HEART,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE OLD INN.

(CONTINUED.)

THE OLD INN.

CHAPTER XIII.

I SAW no more of Lady Helena and her little sister. They left Castleford early the next morning, and Dr. Grey went to see them off. He said they were both looking well, and apparently in good spirits; adding, he thought their host and friends at the Inn would miss them, now they were actually gone.

"Particularly Mr. Bertie," I observed, "who must have become rather spoiled with the extraordinary and flattering notice lately bestowed upon him."

"Well, that is all at an end now, happily.

It was certainly more than enough to turn a young man's head in his position of life. Although he has always been used to receive a good deal of notice on account of his many superior qualifications."

"Well, it is to be hoped now," I said, "that he will return to his proper senses, and make the first use of their restoration in endeavouring to propitiate his lady-love, whom he has no doubt grievously offended."

"I fear that will not be so easy a matter at present," said my husband, "as I find she is gone from home. I called to see Mr. Young this morning as I passed his house on the way from the Inn. I rather thought the poor girl would be glad to hear the 'great ladies' were departed, though I would not for worlds have intimated as much to her, or assumed that she had the slightest interest in the matter. However, I found Mr. Young and his daughter Sophy alone together; they

told me Alice was gone to her sister, Mrs. Weston, Mr. Young observing she had seemed ailing and out of spirits for some time, and he thought the change would be good for her in every way, as Mr. Weston is a medical man with a fair practice, residing somewhere in the suburbs of London, so he sent her there a week ago."

As Dr. Grey made this announcement of Alice Young's present locality, there flashed into my mind by sudden inspiration the recollection of the London postmark on the two anonymous letters lately sent, and I asked my husband if he thought it possible that Miss Young could have had anything to do with them. He hesitated a moment, for I saw the idea was not altogether at variance with his own speculations on the subject, especially as I felt impelled to observe, "It never struck me before, but Alice Young is the only person who could have the least interest in sending them, and she seemed in such

a state of mind when I last saw her that I think she was capable of that or any other rash action, especially when, being at a distance, she would be less likely to be suspected."

"Well," said Dr. Grey, "we must not be too hard upon her, for we all know 'a woman scorned' is a dangerous animal, and no doubt she had great provocation. But we must not take it for granted it was the poor girl's act; there are others who might have looked with envy and suspicion on the extraordinary degree of intimacy and favour accorded to the innkeeper's son by the high-born young lady."

I then asked how Mr. Bertie Lawson bore the departure of the young ladies, and whether they took a very demonstrative leave of him when they left the Inn, but I was informed, in reply, that there was no room for observation on that head, as Mr. Bertie was absent at the time of

their departure, and Dr. Grey understood he had driven himself down to the station, about a couple of miles distant, with some light packages belonging to the ladies, to prevent their being crowded inconveniently in the carriage that took them there, so the parting took place from thence.

Lucy came to see me a few days after the departure of their late inmates. She seemed rather glad that they were gone, though, as she said, nothing could have been kinder and pleasanter than the young ladies, both to herself and her parents, and she missed them from the house; but she was sure things were best as they were, now they were gone, as her brother did not seem as yet to have recovered from the state of excitement in which he had been living for some weeks past. However, she said she hoped he would soon sober down again, and make up his quarrel with Alice Young. She had talked a great deal to her brother about her, and

though he laughed at some things she said, he seemed to feel sorry for her distress; and then Lucy added, if Alice did not return soon, she would try to persuade Bertie to go up and see her, and perhaps fetch her home. She felt quite sure, if he went to London for the purpose of making it up with her, that Alice loved him far too well to be implacable.

I asked if her brother ever talked of Lady Helena or her little sister.

"No," said Lucy; "only casually, and with a good deal of reserve; he never enters upon the subject, only speaking of either of the young ladies, if obliged to do so, as he would of any other people who had been staying at our house, and with the sort of manner that would, I am sure, deter anyone from reverting to the peculiar notice and favour shown to him by both. He will let me talk to him of Alice, but I should not venture to name Lady Helena to him; when others do so, it is only as a

casual inquiry or observation, without any reference to himself, and, as I say, he answers it in the same tone, but never pursues the subject; he is not quite like himself, and yet there is nothing in particular that I can take hold of, but I do think he will be all right again when Alice returns, and he gets back into his old ways with her, and we are all just as we used to *be* in former times."

I asked if her father and mother were still annoyed at the thoughts of the letter, or if they had any suspicion as to who sent it. Lucy said they had not the least idea, and I was very careful to refrain from publishing my own conjectures. Lucy said her father had taken it very much to heart, but her mother soon forgot all about it, and Bertie never alluded to it in any way.

"We shall never know who sent it," said Lucy, in conclusion, and then added, "And perhaps it is as well we should not; there is an end of it now, and of the state

of things that caused it to be sent, so I am only too thankful that such is the case, and shall try to forget all about it."

I too thought, like Lucy, that we should hear no more, either of or from the disturbing element in the person of the Earl's daughter. However, to my surprise, and, I confess, to my satisfaction also, about ten days after their departure, I received a letter from Lady Helena; it enclosed a tiny note to Lucy, which I delivered to her, and she showed it to me. It was very short—only a few kind lines of remembrance, as she said, to one who had contributed so greatly to the comfort and enjoyment of her sister and herself whilst resident in their pleasant house, and begging to be kindly remembered to her father and mother. There was no mention of Bertie in that or in my own letter, which was much longer, entering very fully into all that she and her sisters were doing at Sir Archibald Cameron's pleasant

place. She told me she found it more endurable than she had expected, and liked her future brother-in-law very well. He was good-looking, she said, but rather heavy and dull—she almost wondered at her sister's choice, but then she supposed the fine place, and the magnificent old family jewels, with a hundred other temptations, had something to do with it. For her own part, she thought, intellect and genius were far more valuable possessions than all the worldly pomp and splendour she saw around her with entire lack of them.

Sir Archibald was, she said, devoted to Lady Rosamond, and delighted in overwhelming her with magnificent presents. *A propos* to that, she continued, he was going to London the next week to have all these jewels re-set for his "beautiful bride," and he had persuaded Lord Ashford to go up at the same time, as he wanted Lady Rosamond to choose various things, and of course Lady Katherine must be of the

party to chaperon her sister (who was also to sit for her picture at the same time). So it was settled that, when they all set off for London, she and Daisy should go home together.

Lady Margaret's governess was already there, and it was thought expedient that the little girl should not waste either her own time or that of Mademoiselle Latour any longer (though she said Daisy was quite of a contrary opinion). However, the higher powers prevailed in Daisy's case, and she should not be sorry to accompany the dear child home, where faithful Norris had already preceded them. She could not, she said, accomplish her former design of returning with the old nurse, as she was wanted to travel with Lady Margaret the next week. No doubt she could have been very easily spared by the rest of the family party (that was Lady Helena all over), but Daisy begged to remain another week, and good-natured Sir

Archibald seconded her petition, so the prayer was granted. The next week, therefore, I might think of her and Daisy quietly settled in their old places at home, under Mademoiselle Latour's safe guardianship, and enjoying such liberty and recreation together as the strict requirements of education would permit on Daisy's part.

Such was the sum and substance of Lady Helena's promised epistle. It was altogether a pleasant, cheerful letter, and dwelt more on the present and future of her occupations and amusements than on past scenes and places, or the people who had been known to her in them. Her note to Lucy seemingly disposed of all remembrances belonging to her life at Castleford, whilst she had fully discharged all the demands of a friendship (as short-lived as our own) in sending me such a full, true, and particular account of herself and her present and future proceedings. I was glad to have had the letter,

and pleased to find Lady Helena in a state of greater enjoyment, or perhaps I should say less discomfort than she had (with her morbid view of things in general) allowed herself to anticipate.

After that letter we heard no more of our new friends for some time. I answered Lady Helena's communication, but had no expectation or intention of continuing the correspondence. Neither did the young lady write again. A chance communication from Nurse Norris announced that both her young ladies were arrived at home, and the two elder ones gone to London with their father and Sir Archibald, that after their return home the exact time of the wedding would be fixed, but it was supposed it would take place early in December (it was then November), and after that the whole party would go abroad, and the newly-married pair were also intending to pass the Winter in Italy.

Such was the state of family affairs at

that time, and it often struck me with astonishment when I thought over the events of a few weeks past, when the young Lady Elmsleys were amongst us, their names familiar as a household word, even to the strange and improbable association with places and persons so entirely removed from their own accustomed line of life and thought, and no doubt since that time so thoroughly forgotten by them, or at least, if remembered, divested of all the strange abnormal interest which appeared to fascinate them for the time being; these last reflections being, of course, especially applied to Bertie Lawson.

Lucy reported him from time to time as being unhinged and depressed, and then at others unaccountably elated, and yet with no adequate reason for either state of mind. His father, who was fond of Alice Young, rather pressed his son to go to London after her, and try if he could not win her forgiveness, promising, if they became

really engaged, he would do his utmost to settle them comfortably at his farm, with very fair prospects for the future, though he plainly told his son he should, at his death, leave everything (except the farm) to his mother for her life. After that the old Inn would become his, and he hoped it might be kept up as such, although his son and his wife might not care to reside there.

Bertie seemed to listen with approval to his father's liberal proposals; he knew he was rich for his position in life, and felt assured he should in the end have a goodly heritage, and what could he desire more than that, and the hand of the beautiful girl he had in truth loved so long, in spite of all their many quarrels and misunderstandings, and who, he well knew, loved him passionately, and would be ready to listen to his suit, and forgive the past.

I had a visit from Lucy about that time. Her kind eyes were bright with pleasure, and her whole aspect fraught with satisfac-

tion, as she gladly announced that Bertie was gone to London, and that she hoped she had been in a little way instrumental to his reconciliation with Alice, as she had taken upon herself to write to her, and in a guarded way sound her feelings as to her brother, at the same time telling her her own impression in regard to the continuance of his love for herself, only that he feared a rebuff too much to write or come without some intimation that he should not go to her in vain, reminding her of what she knew so well, the pride and self-will of Bertie's disposition and character; that she felt sure the happiness of both might be hopelessly wrecked for life, unless some one ventured to step in as a mediator, and she hoped Alice would forgive her old friend Lucy for appearing in that character.

I asked eagerly whether she had received an answer from Miss Young, and to what effect. Lucy, with a glowing face, pro-

duced her friend's little note, sent in immediate answer.

"DEAREST LUCY,

"You are the best good friend in the world; but I can't write on some subjects. We have all much to forgive, and I have been very wicked and very unhappy. But Bertie need not be afraid of a journey to London to see

"Yours ever,

"ALICE YOUNG."

"Short," said I, "but entirely to the purpose."

"Is it not?" replied Lucy. "Oh! what a comfort it will be to have things all right again, and my father looking like himself, for he has never done so since that horrid letter; and my mother so pleased, too, for she likes the connection with the Youngs, and Alice also, for when she is her own nice affectionate self, she says it is a pleasure to look at her pretty face, and she is a

daughter-in-law she need not be ashamed of."

I quite entered into the joy of the Lawson family, and only wished it had been Bertie, instead of kind, good Lucy, who had written to his intended.

However we all heard he was gone, as Lucy desired, and everyone wished him well through his wooing. And whilst these thoughts were in our hearts, and words upon our lips, came a strange, wild report, which ran through the town and neighbourhood like wildfire. It was rumoured that Bertie Lawson had sped with his wooing, but with what a bride! For a whisper ran that the Lady Helena Elmsley had eloped from her father's house in Scotland, and the companion of her flight was said to be the inn-keeper's son at Castleford—Bertie Lawson!

CHAPTER XIV.

THIS report appeared so strange and monstrous to everyone that heard it, especially considering the circumstances on which young Lawson had left his home a few days previously, with a very handsome donation from his father on the occasion, as a token of his approval of his errand, that no one seemed inclined to speak openly about it. It was whispered from one person to another, and, as I have said, ran through the length and breadth of the town like wildfire, and thence extended itself into the immediate neighbourhood, where, no doubt, it became the subject of all-absorbing interest and discussion.

However, all speculation on the subject

was soon at an end, and an incontrovertible certainty took its place. The audacious proceeding was even chronicled in some of the newspapers, which entered largely into all the circumstances of the case, and in which there was the brief announcement that on such a day, and in such a church in Scotland, the Lady Helena Grace Elmsley was married to Lambert Lawson, Esq.

An agonized letter from Mrs. Norris to one of her Castleford friends and relatives was the first authentic information received on the subject. The poor woman seemed to fear that her lord would charge her with remissness in not having detected and prevented her young lady's escapade.

Lord Ashford was still in London, superintending the preliminaries of the marriage so gratifying to his feelings in every way. Little did he think that another marriage of so different a description was being arranged and carried out by another daughter from his lordship's own residence.

Never had the poor devoted nurse entertained the lightest intimation in her honest heart that such an unlikely event was ever in the remotest degree in contemplation, or that her young lady could ever so demean herself as to dream of marrying the inn-keeper's son. She knew that Lady Helena was often in the habit of receiving letters with the Castleford post-mark upon them, but she had been informed by her young lady that she wrote to and heard from Mrs. Grey (witness my one letter!), so she entertained no suspicions on the subject, nor did the post-master apparently at Castleford, as, if he thought at all on the matter, or even knew there were letters from the Inn going to the young lady so long resident there, he would have naturally supposed they were letters on business connected with her sojourn there. It seemed, however, that a brisk correspondence had been carried on between Bertie Lawson and Lady Helena from the

time she arrived at her father's place, where there was no one to speculate on the letters she received, and those she sent were always posted by herself.

It is of little consequence, however, to dwell on the means which led to this fatal act of imprudence on Lady Helena's part. She was just of age, consequently there was no difficulty in her contracting a marriage in Scotland, where she and Bertie Lawson met, and he took her to a remote church, where the ceremony was duly performed. As soon as it was concluded, he wrote to his father, whilst Lady Helena addressed a letter to hers. It was very brief, for she knew she had nothing to expect—neither forgiveness, nor any of that necessary article, money. It merely told her father the step she had resolved on taking was for her own happiness, and the only regret she could ever entertain was the feeling that he would disapprove of it. She only asked him to forgive—she want-

ed nothing else, now or ever, from him; she would not even enter into a discussion of the sentiments which induced her to take the step she had done. She had acted from the dictates of reason and conscience, besides feeling, in preferring a union with a man of intellect and superior attainments to any other lot which might await her in life. She cared nothing for the distinctions of rank; those of mind were all that were important to her. She knew her sisters' opinions on the subject, and was aware that a titled rich fool was of far more consequence in their eyes than a man endowed with every noble attribute and elevating acquirement and accomplishment, but of lowly though honest parentage. Against such prejudices she had nothing to urge; she could only say they had their bias, and she had hers, and had proved the sincerity of the sentiments she professed by the step she had taken. She did not seek to excuse it, and she begged

to remain always his lordship's affectionate daughter, Helena G. Lawson.

It was in years long after this that I saw the copy of this letter Lady Helena then wrote to her father, and heard many of the things I now relate. To this letter no answer was ever vouchsafed. Lord Ashford's anger and mortification were too intense and bitter to find vent in words. He said he blamed himself and his own blindness, in leaving a girl like his daughter exposed to the machinations of such a designing set, as he termed the Lawsons. With her weakness and want of attraction, he might be sure she would be "an easy prey." Then Lady Katherine observed in her letter to her sister, which was the only one she ever received after her marriage, and conveyed her father's sentiments as well as her own.

"Although it appears you were determined to disgrace yourself, it never occurred to me—though I felt sure you were ready and willing to do so on the slightest provo-

cation—it never struck me that you were in danger with the son of the inn-keeper, for I chanced to see a handsome girl, in his own rank of life, whom he was engaged to marry, and had long loved. How could I guess that *you*, devoid of every personal grace which could attract a man in *any* station, would, with such unheard-of baseness, seek to break bonds as sacred as those of matrimony between the two, and in your eagerness to be married to *some* one, no matter *whom*, choose to allure a weak, conceited young man, of low station, dazzled by the prestige of your rank, which in his vulgar estimation no doubt looked much more important than it really is! This you did, sister no longer mine, and for the baseness and the perfidy, and the immodesty of your proceeding, I renounce you. Never, never will I speak to or write to you again, and this is written to assure you of my unalterable resolution.

"KATHERINE ELMSLEY."

I do not think Lord Ashford saw the cruel letter written by his eldest daughter to her erring sister. Poor Lady Helena, culpable as she was, did not quite deserve such bitter invective and accusation. She felt almost stunned with the fierce blows dealt against her by one who would never more own her as a sister.

No steps were taken to pursue the runaway pair. Lord Ashford contented himself (after his first paroxysms of rage and wrath against his daughter and the man she had chosen were spent) with renouncing the couple for ever, casting his daughter out of his heart (where she had never held a high place), as she had cast herself out of his house, and sundered the ties of home.

Her brothers, too (Lionel excepted), expressed their opinion that they always considered "Helena would be up to some odd game or other, if she could find anyone she could cajole into marrying her. She always professed funny opinions, so she

was sure to do something queer as soon as she got an opportunity of doing it, and as she had chosen to go out of her own rank of life to accomplish it, she must be left to go her own way, and that was not theirs."

So Lady Helena was formally cut off and dismissed from the family to whom she once belonged.

Lady Katherine also, in the name of her father, denounced the severest penalties on those—Lionel and Margaret—who alone cared for her, should they ever seek in any way to transgress their father's commands.

Thus terminated all connection on the part of Lady Helena Lawson with the family of Elmsley, and I do not think she ever saw any of them again.

But far sadder was the break up in Bertie Lawson's own family, and little less angry was his father than Lord Ashford, who actually cherished the idea that old Mark Lawson had connived at what he termed the disgrace of his family.

The old man was quite heart-broken, and yet indignant, full of disdain at Bertie's double dealing and shuffling conduct in respect to poor Alice Young, whom he had allowed to be made a sort of cover for his underhand proceedings.

Young Lawson wrote to his father, the instant the marriage ceremony was over, a letter which he intended to be both explanatory and conciliatory, at the same time exhibiting a certain spirit of exultation at having won the affection of so high-born a lady, and prevailed on her to become his wife, letting it appear also that she had been quite as eager to win his love as he had been to secure hers. He hardly touched upon the subject of Alice; he only alluded to it by saying he greatly regretted that others had undertaken a part which he had never sanctioned or approved, but being unable at the time to be more explicit, it had led to great misapprehension, he feared, on the part of one he had once loved,

but had long since ceased to think of as his family desired.

Bertie concluded his letter, which no doubt he considered a masterpiece of eloquence and diplomacy, by saying he hoped his father and mother would overlook any little want of formality in his proceedings, and hasten to assure his dear wife, Lady Helena, of their affectionate approval of her choice, and that his father would consider the need and propriety of making such arrangements as might be suitable for an Earl's daughter; yet who was at the same time very anxious to prove herself a dutiful and affectionate child to them both, and a kind and loving sister to Lucy. They would wait his answer and proposal for settlements or allowance at the little sea-place on the coast of Durham, where they were at that time enjoying a blissful but rather anxious honeymoon.

This extraordinary effusion (for clever men and women very often do silly things

in new and unlooked-for circumstances) went the round of the family, for old Lawson never did anything without consulting both his wife and daughter, and up to that time he had been too utterly overwhelmed to be able to arrange his thoughts for any definite line of action.

Mr. Lawson then spoke with stern determination, which was the more impressive to his hearers, as he had always been far more inclined to indulgence than severity in his family, and had always shown the utmost toleration and forbearance in his dealings with his only son (and no doubt Bertie Lawson relied much on his father's never-failing kindness). But his whole tone was now changed—his son had sinned beyond the limits of his forgiveness. He was not to be led away with any plausible arguments to palliate the enormity of his conduct against Alice, and his treachery to Lord Ashford's family. Old Mr. Lawson considered his son had disgraced his own

in intruding himself into one that despised him, and taking advantage of a weak, plain girl, unaccustomed to affection or admiraration, to pretend both, in order to gratify his weak vanity in marrying the daughter of an Earl. If Bertie had been honestly in love with the girl, and the girl with him (as no doubt she fancied she was), he could have forgiven the lad! But no, it was all false, deceit upon deceit; he had forsaken, and perhaps broken the heart of the girl he really loved, and pretended to love one he cared nothing about, and whose plainness of person might ere long repel his "squeamish fancy."

The old man went on to say, no words could express how greatly he condemned his son and despised his conduct; he had besides cast a reproach over his father's house which could never be removed, as well as over that of the family his forefathers had always delighted to honour. That was all over now; it would always be believed

that he, old Mark Lawson, connived at his son's carrying off my lord's daughter, not for love or good looks, but for the paltry boast that he had a "my lady" for his wife. Well, that lady had chosen to forsake her own family and place, and he was very sure it was not fit for her to enter his—*no*, he would have nothing to do with people who had made such a marriage—as they had chosen to brew, so must they bake; he washed his hands of them both.

Then poor Mrs. Lawson began to cry, as did Lucy very bitterly, and the mother called out,

"Why, father, you will never leave the poor young things to starve?"

The father only replied,

"Mr. Bertie has hands and a head; he need never starve."

Lucy took her father's hand in hers, and only looked up in his face with her sad, tearful eyes.

"Come, come, girl, don't think your old father's too hard! No, dear," (to his wife) "I never meant *that;* I will make them a small allowance, and they must make the best of it. As I say, Mr. Bertie has plenty of things to fall back upon and help himself and my lady to a living, but I will never uphold him in the act he has done, or keep him in idleness in consequence; I don't want any words with him or from him, neither will I see him or his wife—no, she is as much to blame as the lad himself; I don't want any argufying on the subject; write to him, Lucy, and say he shall receive one hundred pounds a year from me, and no more at any time; now let us have no more crying or talk about it."

Though the subject was thus dismissed from all discussion, and old Lawson could never be prevailed on to say a single word more, it was evident it preyed on his mind and showed itself in various ways; he

seemed to care little about the Inn business, and after a few months he even declared his intention of giving up the Inn and taking up his abode in the farm-house three or four miles out of Castleford. Thither, in fact, he soon retired; it seemed the old home had become distasteful to him, for he had the long-cherished board in front of one of its gables, on which was inscribed the name of the "Castle Inn" in golden letters, removed; it ceased then to be an inn. Soon after that he dismantled the house and moved all his furniture, keeping only a room or two for an old couple who looked after the place. The Lawsons themselves were seldom seen in the town; Lucy had another and quieter pony and carriage, and sometimes drove her mother down from the farm, and the old lady looked rather more aged and worn than she need have done; but then everyone knew she was grieving for the separation from her only son, yet her husband,

once so kind and indulgent to their boy, never mentioned his name or asked for tidings of him and his lady-wife.

As soon as it was known, through a Castleford lawyer, where Bertie and his wife had fixed their abode, the promised allowance was regularly transmitted to them through the same lawyer, and there all communication ended.

CHAPTER XV.

NOTHING could exceed the young runaway couple's astonishment and consternation when they found that the old Yorkshire inn-keeper could be quite as indignant and implacable as the Earl, besides being as self-willed as Bertie himself. It was entirely a new light to both, and a very unpleasant one. No doubt Lord Ashford was, in his way, as greatly annoyed when he must have heard, through his agent on the Castleford property, the part that old Mr. Lawson had taken in the business. To think that he as steadily refused to acknowledge his lordship's daughter as he had done the old man's son!

It was a severe and unexpected blow to Lady Helena, who had fully expected to be received with open arms by her husband's family, and with all grateful appreciation of her condescension, and the many sacrifices she had made on Bertie's behalf. It was a terrible awakening from her dreams of folly and equality. She found she had relinquished her own position, and fallen from her high estate, but only to be looked down upon as a stranger and an alien in that to which she had descended. She had enjoyed a pleasant dream of sisterly love and kindness from Lucy, whom she really liked, and whose affection, she had hoped, would have made up to her for the cold-hearted sisters who she knew would cast her off on her marriage. She felt she had never been a favourite child with her father, though he had rarely treated her with harshness; she often fancied he cared so much less for her because she was so different from her hand-

some sisters, who all resembled the wife he had loved so tenderly, whilst she was said to be the image of a sister of Lord Ashford's, whom he disliked, and never saw, unless obliged to do so.

Poor Lady Helena's cup of mortification was very full when Bertie's parents turned from her, and even gave up their only son because he had married her. She hardly realised that it was the deep duplicity of her husband's conduct that incensed his honest old father so bitterly, and the slur cast upon his own character in leading to the supposition that he had abetted and connived at the deplorable step. The old man made a fearful sacrifice to prove and uphold his own integrity of act and deed when he cast off the son he had so loved, and even looked up to, and refused to acknowledge the high-born but lowly-minded girl who had given up everything for him.

Whilst Lady Helena wept, and lamented their hard fate, Bertie stormed with anger

and disappointment, but they both agreed as to the necessity of immediate action. They were living at an expensive hotel in the small but fashionable sea-side place to which they had gone to spend their honeymoon. Bertie had engaged a maid for his wife, and surrounded her with every luxury which he considered she was entitled to, but prompted far more by pride than by affection in all he did.

Lady Helena loved her handsome husband with all the passionate fervour of a first attachment, enhanced by the greatness of the prejudices she had set aside to indulge it. Bertie, on his part, was not in the slightest degree in love with his wife. When the first idea of her unfortunate partiality dawned upon his perception, he was as much startled as pleased; then her gentle flattery began to gratify his self-love, and he imagined he entertained a preference for her, which was only a subtler form of self-love.

He did love and had never ceased to love Alice Young, but when she, with the quick discernment of affection, fancied she saw a rival in the high-born girl with whom he had become so strangely associated, he quarrelled with her and broke his implied engagement, refusing to acknowledge that any had ever existed between them. The worse he treated Alice, the more his heart hardened, but at the same time it could hardly be said that it softened to Lady Helena. However, she was satisfied with the flattering persuasion that she was loved for herself and her mental acquirements by this admirable Crichton, whom she fancied she worshipped for his genius —either real or suppositious, and he, on his part, was intoxicated with the idea that an Earl's daughter was ready to overlook every distinction of rank to marry him. When, therefore, the terrible conviction came to the young couple that they were cast off on either side by their nearest and

once dearest relatives in the world, and that they stood alone and isolated with each other, it came with very different force to each.

Although bitterly disappointed and mortified, after the first ebullition of natural feeling, Lady Helena dried her tears and reflected she had still with her the husband whom at that time she preferred to all the world, and fondly thought that this isolation would serve to draw them the closer to each other. It need hardly be said that the young husband's sentiments were of a different and more worldly nature; they were also tinged with a strong feeling of regret for the foolish step he had taken, on finding he should gain nothing and be so great a loser. However, as he and Lady Helena were united, they must consult together how to make the best of their miserable position till better times should dawn. No one can tell what a man or woman's character really is till drawn out by certain

circumstances. So it was now; Bertie Lawson had been generally considered, and had thought himself a good son, but from that time he began to speculate upon his father's death, and the advantages that might accrue to him from that event. He startled, and almost shocked romantic, sentimental Lady Helena by observing that they must get on as well as they could for the present and look forward to better times, when, after his father and mother's death, he should no doubt succeed to a good property, and be able to give her every comfort and luxury that she was entitled to.

This was the first time that a faint suspicion entered poor Lady Helena's head and heart that, under all her husband's apparent smoothness and amiability of manner and speech, there lurked a vein of hardness and selfishness which might in time assert itself more broadly. However, she cast aside the unpleasant and appalling

doubt and entered into the consultation with him, in plain, useful fashion, as to the consideration of ways and means, and how they could best dispose of themselves and manage to exist on the miserable yearly income which Bertie's father had allotted to them. Lady Helena, having lived much abroad, was urgent in her desire that they should establish themselves in some small foreign town, where they might manage to live with tolerable comfort on the one hundred a year promised by Bertie's father, and always afterwards most regularly paid in half-yearly remittances.

To all that his wife said Bertie inclined an attentive ear; he was aware that, young as she was, she knew more of the world and of society than he had ever enjoyed the opportunity of doing, and as Lady Helena made her statements, and showed her acquaintance with foreign ways, and even prices, which she had occasionally

heard discussed, he became, too, convinced that it would be their wisest plan to betake themselves as soon as possible to such a harbour of refuge as she pointed out to him. Thus it happened that within two months of their marriage Mr. and Lady Helena Lawson found themselves fairly established and settled in a small French villa or château in a little village on the coast of Normandy.

It was a pleasant place, and there were some English families also resident there, on much the same account that brought the newly-married couple there (though not exactly from similar family reasons)—only the universal one, of motives of economy.

When fairly established there, Bertie was pleased to find their society was courted by the greater part of the inhabitants. Their exact family history was little known. The immense difference of social standing between the couple was quite unsuspected. None of the inhabitants of D—— had been

in England during the time of the nine days' wonder that followed the announcement of the elopement of Lord Ashford's daughter with the inn-keeper's son. In fact, it was a general belief that Mr. Lawson came of as good a family as his lady wife, whilst he was considered far her superior in appearance and agreeability, and was soon more generally liked.

Lady Helena, always shy and retiring, became doubly so under the new and strange circumstances with which she was surrounded. The society at D—— was hardly such as she had been used to in her father's house, and she shrank sensitively (notwithstanding her dreams of equality) from the over-familiarity and free and easy manners of some of the lady residents at D——. Of course this reticence was set down as pride and assumption by those she did not care to visit.

Bertie Lawson was, however, far more in his natural sphere and element. He had

always exhibited a certain amount of refinement of speech and manner towards those he had formerly looked upon as his superiors, and also possessed a wonderful aptitude and facility for acquiring everything in the way of learning or accomplishments which came in his way. He was not really a literary man, but he could easily acquire a smattering of knowledge of all kinds presented to him. He was a far keener sportsman than a deep reader, so he found plenty of amusement as well as society at D——. He had no intention of following his father's suggestion, and employing either his head or his hands to increase their small income. The only way in which he saw fit to make use of his fertile brains was in a sort of amateur horse-dealing, which he carried out rather successfully with the Normandy ponies and horses, which he bought and sent to England on speculation, having had an opening given to him by one of his new

friends, and which he turned to profitable account, his knowledge and skill in all things pertaining to horses serving him in good stead at this crisis. It was not exactly such an occupation as might have been expected to find favour with a young man of Bertie Lawson's education and attainments; nevertheless, it was one in which he greatly delighted, and, as I have said, he prospered in his chosen vocation.

Lady Helena found that this new calling did not tend to improve her husband's manners or conversation, or to render him more companionable to herself. And then the dreadful doubt began to arise in her mind whether she had not been altogether in error in respect to him, and whether she had not made a fatal mistake in the step which led her to forsake the known for the unknown—to give up all the duties and pleasures of a refined home, to follow the fortune of a man of whom she knew nothing, except that he was hand-

some, and appeared well-mannered and educated for his station in life, and apt at various superficial accomplishments.

At the end of the first year of their residence abroad a boy was born to them, to the unbounded delight of the mother and the vexation of the father. Bertie was of too hard and selfish a nature to find pleasure in children; he only looked on the little child as a source of expense and trouble, and felt rather jealous that there should be a fresh claimant on Lady Helena's time and admiration. No other child ever came to them, and he made no secret of his satisfaction on that account. It was happy for poor Lady Helena that she had a new and absorbing source of happiness, it served to console her under the growing sense of her husband's want of real refinement, and his indifference to everything that did not concern his own comfort, and contribute to his enjoyment.

Lady Helena had a good excuse for re-

maining at home after the birth of her baby. They could not afford an experienced nurse, and she gladly undertook the office herself, with the able assistance of a clever little peasant girl, who became devoted to her lady and her little charge.

Meanwhile Bertie went his way, and found plenty of amusement suited to his taste; he frequented all the concerts, public and private, and was in great request on account of his musical powers, and made some acquaintances in that way which were not altogether desirable. There were little gambling parties in a small way, at which he generally contrived to win more than he lost, and he made himself of importance in various social gatherings.

He had not the natural gentlemanlike deference for others that would have enabled him to bear his honours meekly, and in consequence he became overbearing in manner, and dogmatical in conversation; the slight veneer which had covered his

natural disposition began to wear off, and as familiarity often breeds contempt, it began unhappily to show itself in his home relations with his wife, as well as in public. Lady Helena soon had cause to dread a *tête-à-tête* evening, and eagerly welcomed every invitation to her husband and amusement that took him away.

She found great delight, however, in her child as he grew older and more companionable. He was a delicate boy, and it provoked the father, who, with his perfect health and fine physical frame, knew nothing whatever of sickness or weakness in its various manifestations, and was often angry with his wife for sending for the medical man when the child was particularly ailing, and she dared not trust her own skill.

Lady Helena had her own way in naming the boy after her twin brother who died young, and to whom she was greatly attached, and she fancied her little Gerald resembled him. Bertie Lawson cared too

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little about the matter to oppose his wife's wishes, and he did not want, as he tersely expressed himself, "to make a row about nothing." If the boy had been strong and handsome, like himself, no doubt he would have regarded him with greater favour, but, as it was, he utterly despised the fragile little fellow, and his mother also, for bringing such a poor specimen of humanity into the world.

Time went on with this ill-assorted couple, and they each went their own way. Lady Helena, timid and subdued, but wrapt up in her boy, and all that interested and pleased him, lived as lonely a life as a married woman could well do. But when they had been resident at D—— nearly eight years, a change came over their uneventful existence. News came to them from England requiring their immediate presence. Lucy wrote, at her mother's request, to summon the exiles home; her father had died quite suddenly one day,

and the widow yearned for the presence of her long-banished but beloved son, and entreated him to come home, and bring his wife, with their young child.

Bertie Lawson received the tidings with ill-suppressed exultation. He had long ceased to care for his father, and on being cast off by him, he, on his part, abandoned every former sentiment of love and gratitude, declaring his father's act had cancelled all filial obligation. Thus, when his sister wrote in anguish and trouble, he felt neither sorrow nor remorse; his heart had been gradually hardening, and all he thought of was the benefits he should derive from the old man's removal, and his return to his mother's favour and consideration. Bertie Lawson briefly announced the fact to his wife, desiring her to prepare for instant removal from their present home, and his intention of returning to Castleford.

Lady Helena received the mandate with

her accustomed submission, feeling glad at the prospect of the change, and that she should have the opportunity of taking her boy at last amongst relations who might care for him. It was pleasant to think there would be others to bestow that love upon little Gerald which none but herself had ever felt for him, and to make some amends for Bertie's want of interest in his boy.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE return of Bertie Lawson, with his wife and child, to his native place, was the cause of great excitement and wonder at Castleford. People speculated upon various *minutiæ* in regard to them, especially the one absorbing question—were they to take rank, and be visited in Mr. Bertie Lawson's or in Lady Helena's rank of life? It was at last, I think, carried by general consent that, in virtue of their long residence abroad, where it was understood that Mr. Lawson had been generally received in the most select society with his wife, all recollections of his forefathers' calling should be sunk, and that Bertie should enjoy all the privi-

leges and immunities to which his personal and acquired advantages, as well as high matrimonial connexion, should entitle him in his native town. The old inn-keeper was dead—the Inn itself had long been dismantled—there was no reason why Mr. and Lady Helena Lawson should not take a foremost place in the select circles of Castleford society; so reasoned and so decided the heads of that society.

Meanwhile Bertie and his banished wife, with their little child, arrived at the widowed mother's house, and were there received with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow on the occasion. To a shy, sensitive person like Lady Helena there was also considerable embarrassment on the occasion, and it can readily be imagined how strange it seemed to come amongst her husband's relatives (whom she had never seen since her marriage) in such a new character. When she had parted from them, she was Lady Helena Elmsley, to

whom all the family deferred with the respect due to her position, and now she came to them as a daughter and sister—long cast off, but to be forgiven and acknowledged at last. Happily, good Mrs. Lawson saw and felt nothing of these causes of delicate perplexity, and gladly welcomed Lady Helena as Bertie's wife and the mother of her only grandchild. Lucy, too, in her simple, natural way, with affectionate longing to welcome her home, forgot every former distinction of rank, and thought of Helena now only as one unkindly neglected, and no doubt distressed on that account, and who ought to be the more lovingly received to make amends for her long abandonment. Therefore it was with sisterly warmth she flew to the door to receive Bertie and his wife as they drove up to the farm-house where the Lawsons had lived ever since his marriage.

"And the darling child; oh, how happy I am to see you all home!" exclaimed Lucy,

adding to Helena—"My mother is in the parlour longing to see you, but she has had so much trouble lately, it affects her sadly; she trembles so at hearing you are come, she could not walk to the door."

Lucy's greeting served very much to put Lady Helena at her ease, and with one hand in hers, and holding her boy in the other, she advanced to meet good Mrs. Lawson as her mother-in-law! It was a strange feeling that, quite different from looking on Lucy, with her gentle, lady-like voice and manners as her sister, but to think of Mrs. Lawson as a mother (and now that her delusions in respect to Bertie had vanished) was somewhat startling and oppressive. Lady Helena remembered the buxom landlady, and for a moment her meek spirit quailed; however, she had but little time to think, for it was only a step across the passage and they were in the parlour, and in the presence of Mrs. Lawson, before she could define her thoughts.

It was a moment of relief to Helena, for in the aged woman, wan with grief for the husband she had loved so long and missed so sorely, and in her sombre garments and widow's cap, there was nothing to repel the most fastidious, and the kiss of welcome was as kindly received as it was given, and after Bertie had been duly embraced and wept over, the little grandson was eagerly asked for.

"Here he is, mother," said Bertie, withdrawing the shrinking child from the safe cover of his mother's shawl, under which he had endeavoured to conceal himself from his new relatives, being quite unused to give or receive any demonstrations of affection except from his mother. His father, however, brought him up to the grandmother's chair, saying,

"You will soon see him—there is not much of him; I fear you will think we have not improved on the old stock; your son was about twice as big at his age."

"Ay, that you were, my dear; but oh, dear, it's all that foreign air that has made him so small!—we'll soon fatten him up, and he'll grow quite tall and strong in our Yorkshire air."

"I fear not," said his father, in a disparaging tone; "Master Gerald is too puny a specimen of a boy ever to make a fine man. We think him like his mother, don't we, Helena?"

"I fear that is not saying much for him," said poor Lady Helena in answer, whilst Lucy felt for the wife, and conjectured sadly how it was between her and her selfish brother.

The boy, however, emboldened by his aunt's kind face and gentle ways, said in a whisper to her,

"I like to be like mamma, and not papa —I don't want to be like him."

Bertie was a great deal too much occupied with himself and his new position to take any notice of his son's sayings or his

wife's feelings; he left it to Lucy to answer the one and soothe the other.

Lucy took no notice of the boy's remark, and busied herself hospitably for their entertainment; but Bertie rather scorned her efforts in that way, and took upon himself the air of the master of the house, and said he would go into the kitchen and give his own orders, though he feared they had not much of a cook to execute them, but she might take the brat away, and feed him in any way most convenient; to which Lady Helena quietly added—

"Thank you, and I will come with you, for Gerald is very shy, and not used to go without me anywhere."

There was much to depress in their first meeting, and afterwards, too, the remaining hours of that day brought nothing more gratifying to the feelings of the elder mother, who had thought so much of the return of the dearly-loved son, and introduction to the grandchild. The boy, then

between seven and eight, was very slight and pale, with large dark mournful eyes, resembling his mother's, small features, neither good nor bad—nothing remarkable about him except his fragile appearance.

Bertie himself was grown stout, and more florid in face—a coarse likeness of his former self both in looks and speech—a self-satisfied, self-indulgent, selfish man, and that Lucy read in every word and act of her brother before the first day drew to a close. She looked on Helena with unfeigned commiseration; her small figure was attenuated, and her pale, sallow face wore an anxious, disappointed look, that spoke for much that she had gone through in her most ill-fated marriage. There was no show even of affection between the pair. Lady Helena asked to have her boy's crib placed in her own room, and Bertie begged to be excused occupying the nursery also, so he took possession of the most comfort-

able room, and left his wife to find another with the child.

"You do not find Helena improved in looks?" he remarked to his sister, carelessly, as they descended the stairs together; to which Lucy replied—

"She seems worn and tired with her journey, but I daresay will recover her usual looks in a few days." To which the husband answered, with a short laugh—

"I do not expect you will find much difference—plain people do not improve with increase of days or years, neither do pretty ones, for you, Lucy, don't look as young as you did when I last saw you."

"Nor you, brother," retorted Lucy. "The eight years have made as much change in you as in anyone, I think; but it is only what we must expect."

"Well, I don't know what *you* expected, but I must find out what my own expectations are as soon as may be convenient,

and perhaps you can enlighten me on that subject before I trouble my mother."

This was Bertie's first approach to the subject of his father's will, and as it was a month since his death, he observed he supposed it had been proved, and all needful steps taken by his mother, who no doubt was the principal person benefited by it. Though Bertie said this as if it was nothing more than he expected (to be disinherited), he yet looked eagerly in his sister's face to see if there were still a gleam of hope for him. Lucy seemed pleased to be able to answer quite readily,

"Oh, you need not be afraid, Bertie, it is all right. My dear father never altered anything in his will; he had it drawn up at the time he told you that you would have the farm and land besides during mother's lifetime, but he should leave the Old Inn and all his personalty to her for her life."

"Ah!" replied Bertie, "I remember it was at *that* time—about Alice, poor Alice!

And what has become of her? I have never forgotten her."

"That is a pity," said Lucy, "for she has long been married to a General Stuart. She met him at her sister's house; he was a friend of Mr. Weston's. She went out to India with him, and I have not heard much of her since, for I do not often see Sophy."

Mr. Lawson was obliged to be content with this scanty information respecting his old love—and it was not very gratifying to his self-love. Lucy wisely abstained from telling him that his cruel desertion had preyed much on the poor girl's mind and health for some time. That she had remained with the Westons, and had, in process of time, been induced to accept a Colonel Stuart (since General), who had fallen desperately in love with her, and had at last succeeded in winning her hand, and possibly her heart afterwards.

The subject of old Mr. Lawson's will

was far too interesting to his son not to be broached at the earliest opportunity with his widowed mother, he observing that he supposed she was then living in his house. That remark led to further discussion, which ended in Mrs. Lawson saying,

"It is lucky we know what your dear father wished, and Lucy and I can move any day to the Old Inn."

"Well," replied Bertie, "I think I should like to change with you, mother, if you like to remain where you are; and Helena and I and the brat could take up our abode in the Old Inn, and restore it to what it was in the olden days—the 'Manor House.' But what about the furniture? you say he left it all to you as personal property. Can't I see the document? Where is it—at your lawyer's?"

"No, my dear, close at hand," replied his mother, going to a bureau standing in the room, and taking out a parchment duly inscribed as the last will and testa-

ment of Mark Lawson. This Bertie eagerly opened, and found all as had been said, but—it was not signed!

"But—is this all? This is only a copy, not my father's actual will."

"Yes, my dear, it is all there is. But what does it matter, we know what he wished, just as well as if it were signed twenty times over; and very glad I am that he made no other, and that you are so handsomely provided for, as well as Lucy and myself."

Bertie laughed a low, scornful laugh, as he replied,

"Handsomely provided for! I should think so! Why, don't you see—don't you know this is no will at all?"

"But it is what your dear father wished and intended, and we are all bound to abide by it."

"Not I, for one," exclaimed the son and heir, starting up to assert his new position. "Why, mother, you have not a leg to stand

upon! This will, as you call it, is mere waste paper, and I, as heir at law, claim everything, except what you, as the widow, may please to lay hold of. It is *mine*, all! Everything—this house and farm, the old Manor House, or Inn, and two-thirds of personal property; and this I claim as my rightful heritage. After the shameful treatment of the last eight years by *every* member of my family, I do not think I owe much respect either to the memory of the departed or the claims of the living."

But I will not enter into further detail on this most unpleasant and unprofitable subject. I have related things as regards the Lawsons' residence abroad, and return home, as I have gathered them from Lady Helena and from Lucy, and continue on the same authority.

No words could express the intense astonishment and dismay of poor Mrs. Lawson at the attitude taken by her son against her—and his dead father. I be-

lieve the latter hurt the good woman most. However, there was no disputing the fact of the unsigned will. It was mere waste paper to one who regarded nothing but his own selfish interest. It is sad to relate, but such things are, and have been, and will be.

Poor Mrs. Lawson had to relinquish her comfortable home; she had a certain income arising from her thirds of personal property, and with that she hired a small house in Castleford, where Lucy and she took up their residence as their future home. They said but little on the occasion, for Lucy wished, if possible, to keep on terms with her grasping brother for the sake of his wife and child; and Mr. Bertie himself, after he had got possession of the uttermost farthing, was quite ready to condone all offences and keep on such terms with his mother and sister as might look well in the eyes of the world. To that world he declared, in an off-handed way,

that though he was obliged to assert his lawful rights, he forgave those who sought to deprive him of them, but, considering he had a son and heir, and that the boy's mother was the daughter of an Earl, he thought they had a right to be considered also—so for their sakes, as well as his own, he took possession of all that he was entitled to. No one cared about the matter, and the young man in possession was, of course, a more profitable acquaintance than the two women, mother and daughter, living in a little house in Castleford, so he was courted and fêted, and no one gave a thought to the others.

Mr. and Lady Helena Lawson soon took up their abode at the Old Inn, then dignified with the name of the Manor-house. Bertie did not care to alter the place or lay out much money in alterations and decorations. Lady Helena had a pretty drawing-room, in which to receive the many callers that soon claimed her

acquaintance ; and there was a spacious dining-room, made so by throwing two rooms into one, in which Mr. Lawson entertained his friends—in fact, he lived always with rather more freedom of expense than the actual state of his finances justified. He set up a pack of harriers, and became popular on that account; he bought and rode the finest horses in the county, and rode them well too. There was no one like Bertie Lawson at a steeplechase; it was a splendid sight, they said, to see him ride, and many sought him on that account.

At that time I renewed my acquaintance with Lady Helena, and I believe it was to the mutual satisfaction of both. She and her husband had become on rather better terms after they went to live at the Manor-house; he felt that she added to his importance, so he desired her to dress well, and do credit to his position as a Yorkshire squire. The poor boy was the great thorn in his side. His timidity increased

with years; they dared not send him to school because he was by nature a *coward*, and his devoted mother prayed so earnestly that the evil day might be averted, till he was older and stronger, that the father granted her prayer, and the boy remained at home, a tutor coming daily to teach him.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO or three years passed away after Mr. and Lady Lawson's arrival at the Manor-house. Things were not improving with them; Bertie spent lavishly on everything that tended to his own gratification, and when funds ran low he raised mortgages on his property, so that Gerald was not likely to benefit greatly from it hereafter. He had a set of horsey friends, better born perhaps than himself, living constantly upon him, and encouraging him in everything that was worst for his person and pocket; they drank to a greater or less extent, and Bertie was not behind his friends, but with his splendid constitution he did so for a long time with far more impunity than most of them.

Lady Helena avoided her husband's friends as much as possible, and tried to make another set for herself; but by degrees these fell away, and ceased to come to a house where they might meet some very questionable characters. I have heard Mr. Lawson taunt his wife with the absence of her fine friends, and suppose they were following the example of her own family in keeping aloof from her.

One of her greatest trials was when Mr. Lawson insisted on the presence of his boy at some of the orgies held by himself and friends. It was not that he had any pleasure in the boy's company, but he chose to assert his own authority in opposition to that of the mother. He used to declare he would not allow him to be a molly-coddle and a milksop, and he should drink wine instead of water. Mr. Lawson was not a drinker by nature, he only took to it in compliment to his new friends and associates, and in those days it was not thought

as disgraceful for a man to take a little too much as it would be now.

It was on one of these occasions—the only time that I ever heard Lady Helena (in the bitterness of her spirit) speak unadvisedly with her lips. It was one day, she had taken me out driving, and asked me to return and dine with her alone, saying Mr. Lawson was out with his harriers (it was in October), and was to dine with one of his hunting friends afterwards. When we arrived at the Old Inn, as soon as we entered the hall we heard sounds of revelry from the dining-room; and Lady Helena found, to her vexation, that her husband had returned unexpectedly, and brought in some men to a late luncheon. She had left her boy in the study with his tutor, and asked rather anxiously after him of the servant who had opened the door. The man said Master Gerald (Lady Helena always called him Gerald, and never Lawson, to the servants)

had finished his lessons, and Mr. Mason (the tutor) was gone home, and his master had sent for him to the dining-room, to speak to the gentlemen there.

Lady Helena uttered a hasty word of annoyance, and without a moment's consideration went on impetuously, threw open the door of the dining-room, and stood for a moment on the threshold surveying the company, who looked astonished at her unexpected appearance, but stood up to greet her. She took no notice of them, only, looking round, saw her boy standing by a gentleman with a full glass in his hand, which he was just in the act of raising to his lips. She rushed up and dashed the glass to the ground. Then, taking his hand in her own to lead him away, she made a slight bow to the gentleman, saying, "Sir, my son never touches wine, at least to my knowledge, or with my consent," and without another word she walked away, still holding the boy's hand.

Lady Helena, without casting a look at her husband, proceeded on her way, her whole frame quivering with agitation and suppressed anger.

He sprang after her with a savage look, and following her to the foot of the stairs, said,

"If you ever expose yourself and me in that way again, Madam, it will be the worse for you."

She turned upon him as she never had done before, her cheeks burning and her eyes glittering with passion, as she said,

"How can it be worse for me than it is now, unless you kill my boy with your riotous doings, teaching him to drink with your disreputable friends, and making this house like a public-house? Oh! Mr. Lawson, cannot you ever forget your former calling?"

I trembled to hear her thus brave the coarse, strong man who stood beside her, looking as if he could have struck her with

pleasure. I dared to interfere in such a crisis, and said,

"Do not be angry, Mr. Lawson, for I know wine would be bad for your boy; he is too nervous and excitable as it is."

Bertie Lawson saw me for the first time, and looked ashamed of his passion, but not of his wife's reproof, for he then bowed to me, and answered,

"I am not questioning the subject of wine-drinking, nor do I think it would harm the brat" (he always called him "the brat"), "but I am obliged to you for your advice on the subject."

That was said with a slight sneer, and then he turned to his wife, his anger having calmed down, and speaking perfectly coolly and collectedly, he said,

"I will, in the presence of this lady—Lady Helena Lawson—answer the question you have just addressed to me, whether I can ever forget my former call-

ing, supposing it to be that of a publican, which I can tell you it never was, though it was my father's. No, I never can forget former days, and happy days spent in this house before you came into it; and I never can forget that you lured me away from everything I cared for in life—that you thrust your unsolicited love upon me, till in an evil day I became your victim, and forsook my station (or *calling*, if you will) in life, and, far more than all, abandoned the girl, the beautiful girl, I loved with all my heart's devotion. No, my Lady Helena, *I* am not likely to forget it, and I hope you will not again forget *yourself*."

He made her a mocking bow, and went back to his friends in the dining-room.

She turned to me with quivering lips and said,

"Could you ever have supposed it possible that *that* man could have been the

person you once knew, and that I so foolishly, madly cared for? Well, I have saved my boy this time, and, if I can, I must get him sent to school."

Poor Lady Helena! she had been rudely roused from her early dream of love, and had become well-nigh callous in regard to her husband. Nevertheless, she had been habitually meek and forbearing towards him, and this outbreak was a very exceptional occurrence both on her own part and on his also. Mr. Lawson had generally behaved towards his wife with easy indifference, only now and then indulging in a cutting observation, which she seldom or ever resented. But this was likely to lead to a serious breach between them, and she felt it, and after a time, during which we sat silent and almost frightened, she suddenly observed to me,

"I have been wrong—I ought not to have been so violent, but it was for my boy." Then she cried bitterly, adding—

"What shall we come to, if such scenes are of frequent recurrence? Oh, that I should have fallen so low!"

I said a few soothing words to her, but it was beyond the reach of friendly counsel or comfort; only when Helena dwelt upon her husband's cruel words, I was able to urge, and with truth, that he was hardly himself; he had been riding hard and drinking freely, was greatly irritated at her reproaches, and said everything most cutting, no doubt without meaning half he said, and that he would be sorry for his violence and not repeat it. She shook her head sadly; however, when she heard him coming upstairs to dress and go out to dinner, she opened the door of her sitting-room as he passed, and meeting him in the passage, said,

"Bertie, I was wrong in speaking to you as I did just now—forget it, and forgive me. I know you do not love me, but you need not declare it in the terms you

did, though I know I provoked you, and perhaps you did not quite mean all you said. Do not let us have any more of these disgraceful scenes, for as we are bound together, let us both bear it as well as we can."

Mr. Lawson looked rather surprised, then considerably relieved, and a very little bit touched at his wife's gentle appeal; he took the hand she held out to him, and shook it graciously, saying carelessly,

"I am sure I hate scenes as much as you can do, Helena, and have no wish to bear malice, and am quite as ready to forgive and forget as you can be, so let us say no more about it. Good-bye."

With that he actually bent down and impressed a hasty kiss on her forehead, and went whistling away to his own room.

After this, I think things went on more smoothly for a time, and it was conceded to Lady Helena's anxious request that the boy should at no time, or under any pre-

tence, be introduced to his father's boon companions; and as Mr. Lawson troubled himself very little about his son, unless he unfortunately came in his way, there was no further cause of complaint on that head, and the boy remained at home.

It was in the following Spring that I heard with regret of an event that I feared would not contribute to promote the harmony of the household at the Old Inn—or the Manor-house. This was the return to Castleford of Alice Young, now a widow—Mrs. Stuart; her husband, General Stuart, had been dead about a year, and she was lately home from India, where the General had died. I heard she was come to be near her father, who was in failing health, and she had, on that account, settled to live near him for a time at least, and had hired a good house in his immediate vicinity. It was rumoured that Mrs. Stuart had a fair fortune left her by her husband, but as she had two boys, it was possible that her

means might not be so large as was reported. We heard that she was in very good looks —handsomer even at nine-and-twenty than she had been at nineteen; her boys were also good-looking, well-grown lads of nine and ten.

The arrival of this beautiful widow and her sons caused much excitement, and she was welcomed back with great *empressement* by those who had known her formerly, and those who had not been acquainted with her in her young-lady days, made a great point of being introduced to her in her new and more important character. Mrs. Stuart appeared at church the first Sunday after her arrival, looking lovely in her weeds, and very interesting, with a handsome boy on each side; she never raised her beautiful eyes during the service, and was therefore, perhaps, unconscious of being the object of many a fixed gaze and furtive glance from various quarters. I was sorry for Lady Helena when I saw the

wrapt look that her husband, even in such a place and at such a time, bent on the face of his early love.

As Mr. Lawson did not often accompany his wife and child to church, there was little doubt as to what brought him there that day. There was much curiosity expressed, and I am sure felt, to know how Mrs Stuart would meet Mr. Lawson, whether Lady Helena would call upon her, and on what terms the two families were likely to inhabit the same place. There had been no visiting hitherto between the Youngs and the Lawsons, therefore it did not seem at all incumbent on Lady Helena to take the initiative in the case of Mrs. Stuart and call upon her. I soon found that was Lady Helena's view of the matter, and that she had no intention of so doing, neither did her husband say a word to her on the subject, or ask her to do so. Lucy told me she went to see her former friend, and that Mrs. Stuart received her kindly,

and as if she had forgotten everything that was unpleasant in their former intercourse. Lucy said Alice was wonderfully softened in speech and improved in manner—that she had inquired after her brother, his wife and child, and as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to do so—in fact, Lucy thought Alice had quite forgotten or forgiven his perfidious conduct towards her, and would be ready and willing to be on terms of common friendship again. Mrs. Stuart had told Lucy she had been very happy in her married life, and seemed to think that she could not have been as perfectly so with any other person than General Stuart, so she evidently bore Bertie no grudge.

The weeks and the months passed away after Mrs. Stuart's arrival, and Mr. Lawson had managed apparently to reinstate himself in the beautiful widow's good graces. It is said—I don't know who heard it, but possibly Mrs. Stuart repeated it herself—

that upon one occasion Mr. Bertie Lawson, contrary to his usual custom, waxed sentimental with his former love, and went the length of begging pardon and asking her forgiveness for his past ill-conduct. The widow looked at him with something of her old spirit and said, with apparent astonishment and a twinkle of malice in her steadfast eyes,

"Forgiveness, Mr. Lawson! is it possible you can think you require it from *me?* Why, I always feel I owe you unspeakable gratitude in delivering me from the effects of my girlish folly and infatuation; you helped to bring about my most happy marriage, and saved me from what I believe would have been a very miserable one, so all thanks are due to you; but let this suffice, for I do not care to repeat them."

I believe Mr. Bertie Lawson withdrew very crestfallen from the fair widow's presence. Nevertheless it soon became evident that, like a singed moth, he hovered round

his former flame; for whatever it pleased him to do that he did, and often in defiance of his wife's feelings. Lady Helena could not help observing the eagerness with which her husband sought and courted every opportunity of seeing the woman he had so dearly loved as a girl, but it was patent to every observer that all the eagerness was on his side—apparently there was not the slightest response on the lady's part. She quietly rejected all his offers of attendance, as well as horses to ride and drive, and ponies for her boys, who he declared were the finest little fellows he ever saw, and of whom he talked constantly *before*, though never *to*, his wife, frequently drawing comparisons between them and his own poor child, which might with truth have been termed "odious."

Poor Lady Helena's cup of misery and mortification seemed full to overflowing, but the last overwhelming drop had yet to be added. The Summer and great part of

Autumn were past and gone, and Bertie Lawson had returned to his favourite pastime, that of hunting, leaving him less time for the still pleasurable one of flirting, though it may be observed he was not a man with whom many women would care to flirt. He was still very handsome, but there was a reckless air about him, and in all he said and did, with a certain degree of coarseness, that was by no means attractive, especially in a married man. It was to that latter circumstance that Mr. Lawson attributed his ill-success, when he most wished to fascinate, rather than to any shortcomings on his own account. He and his wife remained on terms of distant civility, whilst he never noticed his son, except to snub him or find fault. It was no secret amongst his friends that Lady Helena's plainness of person disgusted him, and his boy's weakness had much the same effect.

It happened one ill-fated day in November, dreary and dark as usual in that

month, that Lucy sent up a hasty note begging her brother and his wife to come to them immediately, as her mother had been seized with sudden and alarming illness. Mr. Lawson obeyed the summons with a very ill grace, for it was a hunting day, and a favourite meet. However, for once he sacrificed his own inclinations for decency's sake, and went to see his dying mother. He found her quite as ill as Lucy had represented, and as it was said she might go off at any moment, they remained until the evening, when Mrs. Lawson was pronounced a shade better. Her son seized upon that declaration as a pretext for immediate departure. But Lady Helena, seeing poor Lucy's tearful eyes and anxious looks, proposed remaining during the night —sending up a note with a few orders for things to be sent.

Mr. Bertie Lawson, thus released, went away, but in a very indifferent humour. He had missed what he believed to be the

finest meet of the season, he had also missed seeing Mrs. Stuart, who was going to drive with a friend to covert-side, and, worse than all, his mother had, on her dying bed, taken courage to say more to him on his life and conduct towards his own family than she had ever dared to do before. So all these circumstances contributed to vex him considerably.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. LAWSON entered his house in a very dissatisfied state of mind. His intention was to dine by himself, and then go down and finish his evening at the gentlemen's whist-club in Castleford. Unfortunately, there had been some mistake in the message Lady Helena sent home, consequently Mr. Lawson was not expected. It had been supposed he would remain with her ladyship at his mother's house—at least, till the night—not such a very unreasonable inference, after all. Thus it happened that the cook went out, and there was no one at home to supply her place but a raw young kitchenmaid, lately imported into the family.

Upon what trivial things most important matters hang, from the days of Troy downward! Seeing there was no chance of dinner, or, at least, such as Mr. Bertie Lawson considered worthy of the name, he ordered some biscuits and brandy and water to be taken into the room upstairs, and in a very ill-humour followed the tray a few minutes after. If there had been any dinner awaiting him, he would have gone at once into the dining-room, and remained there till such time as he saw fit to betake himself to the whist-club. Happening thus to go upstairs to the room where his wife generally sat, he chanced to encounter his son. The boy was sitting in his mother's chair whimpering; he had just heard that she was going to stay out the night, which was an unprecedented state of affairs, and one at which he felt greatly aggrieved, and ready even to do battle with his father on that account.

Gerald was a very nervous, timid boy,

and yet cross and contradictory to those he disliked. He never ventured to say much to his father, but he would scowl at him behind his back, and say disagreeable things of him when he was not likely to hear, and sometimes even when he was. In the present instance he was half crying, and talking to one of the servants, who happened to be there lighting the candles and drawing the curtains. To this woman he spoke in a sharp, querulous tone.

"So mamma is not coming back to-night? And pray where am I to sleep? If she is not in her room, I don't care to sleep in mine—it will be so lonely!"

"Well, Master Gerald, you had better go and sleep in the same passage where your papa is; he can take care of you, I suppose."

"Papa!—I would not go near him if I could help it—I would rather sleep in the ghost-room, and I should not much like that, because, you know, there is some-

thing that walks there," said the boy, in a low, terrified tone of voice.

"And I think there is something that *talks*," put in a loud voice behind the chair, "and talks like a very foolish, naughty boy."

Gerald turned round, and beheld his father, and his spirit quailed before the lowering glance that was bent upon him. However, the boy took courage to say,

"Oh, papa, please just do me a kindness for once, and send for mamma back. She forgets I cannot sleep in my little room unless she is in hers opening into it."

"A likely thing!" returned the father. "Why, you selfish brat, don't you know your mamma is staying with your grandmother, who is dangerously ill?"

"Then why don't you go to her instead? —she is your mamma," said the contumacious young gentleman.

"Come, come, you young beggar, I am not going to bandy words with you, and

the sooner you make yourself scarce the better pleased I shall be, so off to bed as quick as you can go."

"But it is not my bed-time," whimpered the boy.

"Then it ought to be, so do you hear—go at once."

"But I can't go, unless mamma is there."

"Very well; then go somewhere else, only go."

"No I won't," said the boy, beginning to cry in earnest as his father grew more angry.

"Oh, won't you, my young master?—here, Sarah," to the housemaid, who had remained in the room during this conversation, and afterwards repeated it, "be so good as to see this young gentleman safe into the wainscot-room, where he shall pass the night, as he declines to occupy his own room; take his things there and leave him."

"What, the ghost room!" exclaimed the boy, in an agony of terror. "I won't go there, and nothing shall make me!"

"We shall see as to that."

And then Mr. Lawson advanced, with his tall, bulky frame, and came to where the poor little boy was sitting shivering with rage and fear, and took him by his miserable little shoulders, saying,

"A pretty pass we have come to!—a boy of ten years old crying for his mammy and afraid to sleep in a room by himself! High time to be cured of such rubbish! Ghosts, indeed! why, you are more like a ghost yourself than a human being! Come, come along, and behave like a man for once, or I must teach you."

All this time he was pushing the wretched child in front of him, till he came to the door of the room called the wainscot-room. It was a good-sized apartment, without anything very ghostly in its general appearance, except a dark oak

wainscoting which ran high round the room and made it a little gloomy, otherwise it was well furnished and nothing objectionable about it; it had got a bad name, however, from some tradition of a murder and suicide having been committed in it some hundred years before, and a rumour ran concerning it that the unfortunate man, having been buried according to the laws then existing in respect to self-murder, could not rest, not having been interred in consecrated ground; his spirit was therefore reported to haunt the place where the crime had been committed, but I do not know that anyone had seen the ghost, or even heard of it, of late years.

Now Gerald, like most weak people, had an intense craving after hearing of horrors, and an equally intense fear of encountering them, so it may be conceived what were his feelings as his strong, remorseless father pushed him into this chamber of imaginary horrors. Mr. Lawson, whose nerves were

of iron, and his sensibilities of the same metallic hardness, could not, it may be supposed—and it is to be hoped—enter into the sensations of the nervous, terrified child as he doomed him to this torture. The boy, after one agonized shriek, sat down on the floor, as it were, stupefied, or, as his father believed, subdued by his own firmness and resolution (he had never had an opportunity before of exercising his authority in so marked a degree, owing to the watchful tenderness of the child's mother, so it was rather gratifying to the man thus in her absence to domineer over the boy he so utterly despised). He did not wait long with the miserable child, for the room had been got ready for a friend he expected the following day, and as the housemaid soon fetched his night things and placed them on a chair close to the boy, his father contented himself with a parting admonition to make haste and undress and get into bed, and tell him

next morning what the ghost did and said to him during the night.

After that exploit, Mr. Bertie Lawson locked the door outside, put the key into his pocket, and went out to spend the remainder of the evening. It occurred to him, however, that, considering the dangerous state of his mother, and that his wife was with her on that account, it might be as well not to go to the club that night. He therefore went to the house of an intimate bachelor friend, and finding him at home and alone, remained with him till the small hours of the morning, playing *ecarté* and drinking hot toddy.

When he returned home, he forgot to leave the key of the ghost-chamber for the housemaid the next morning, and was not very clear how he got to bed at all himself that night. He was, however, roused from his dead slumber early the next day by Lady Helena's return, his mother having passed away quietly in the night. It had

been a very peaceful departure, and Lady Helena had stayed a little time with Lucy in her first grief, but having seen her perfectly calm and resigned, she left the house of death as early as she could, to go back to her boy, who, she feared, might miss her, and be alarmed and uncomfortable at her absence.

It was about eight o'clock when she reached home, a dark, foggy November day. She found the housemaid downstairs opening shutters and lighting fires, and having briefly told her of Mrs. Lawson's death, asked if she had been into Master Gerald's room, and whether he had slept well without anyone in the next room. That inquiry was answered by the woman's saying she could not get into Master Gerald's room, as master had got the key, and was not up yet. That statement led to further detail and explanation, and poor Lady Helena was half frantic when she heard the history of her poor boy's cruel

detention in a room he so feared and abhorred. She flew to the door, rapping loudly at it, and calling the child by every endearing name she was in the habit of employing towards him, at the same time desiring the housemaid to take one of the men to her master's room, wake him up, and get the key from him. The mother stood without, knocking and calling, but there was no response from within, and her terror and agony grew with every moment's suspense. At last the servant appeared with the key, and the door was opened, and the mother rushed into her darling's room. One glance showed her the bed was unoccupied, another discovered the form of the boy lying on the floor, pale as death, and without any symptom of remaining life in the small helpless body, which continued perfectly motionless on the bed where it was placed.

"He is dead!—he has been killed at last!—cruel, cruel!" burst from the mo-

ther's agonised lips, and she spoke no more till Dr. Grey, who was hurriedly sent for, arrived.

He examined the child, and told the mother he was not actually dead, but was in a fit, and he could not answer for his life, if he ever came out of it. Dr. Grey took up his station by the boy's bed to watch some symptoms of returning animation, but on hearing from the servant the history of the preceding evening, he instantly desired that he should be removed from that room, and taken into his own, and laid upon the little bed there.

Whilst these orders were being executed, the father having recovered from the effects of his night's entertainment, and received the tidings of his mother's death in his own apartment, lounged upstairs into that he had appointed to his son the previous evening. On seeing Dr. Grey, his wife, and others busily engaged about the poor child, he asked what it all meant, and why

they were making such a row in the house at such a time?

Bertie Lawson, hard and apathetic as he was, almost quailed before the look of indignation with which his patient, much-enduring wife met him, thrusting away the hand with which he would have touched the boy's senseless form.

"Do not touch him, monster that you are! You have taken advantage of my absence with your dying mother to kill my boy—the only, only creature I have on earth to love! Go away and leave us to ourselves, and do not dare come near me."

"Gently, gently," returned her husband, yet at the same time shrinking back from her righteous indignation. "You need not be so violent, Helena, and my poor mother just dead. The boy is only in a faint. I really meant it all for his own good, and to try and make a man of him. You have made him such a molly-coddle, and now you see the consequences. If it is any-

body's fault, it is yours, not mine. How could I tell it would hurt the boy to sleep in a room that was got ready for my best friend? He declared he would not sleep in his own, so what was I to do? You should not have left him."

"No, I ought *not*," retorted his wife, with flashing eyes. "Not even to nurse your dying mother, whom you left in her last extremity. I *ought* to have remembered that you were as capable of killing your son by indirect means, as of abandoning your mother, and cruelly neglecting your wife. Go away. I will never speak to you more."

"As you like," he muttered, turning carelessly on his heel. "I am sure I shall have no loss, if you continue to speak as pleasantly to me as you have just done."

After the boy was laid in his own room, with some dim return of consciousness, Mr. Lawson called Dr. Grey into his special apartment, as he was leaving, and asking

how the boy was, expressed something like contrition for his thoughtless act, but declared, though he wished to punish the boy for being rude to him, he had no idea of any real harm coming of the experiment, wishing at the same time to cure him of his foolish fancies—the result of his mother's over-indulgence.

Dr. Grey heard the exculpation gravely, and expressed his opinion as to the extreme seriousness of his son's case. But whilst he strongly blamed the father, he exonerated him from all design on the child's life. A man like Mr. Lawson he knew was perfectly incapable of understanding or realizing the danger of such a proceeding to a child of such an extremely nervous temperament and delicate constitution. The injury done he feared might be irreparable, for if the boy recovered, he would probably remain an idiot for life.

CHAPTER XIX.

FROM that dreadful doom happily the poor boy was saved. The fits came on again almost as soon as partial consciousness returned, and with each succeeding one the small amount of bodily strength ebbed rapidly away; his mental capacity never returned, except as evinced in a slight recognition of his mother, when, after a paroxysm of terror in which he called out that "It walked—it walked, and was close upon him!" then turning and seeing his mother, the poor boy faintly murmured,

"Oh, you are come back, mamma; dear mamma, kiss me, and never leave me again with papa!"

Soon after that the child's terrors seemed to pass away, he sank into a quiet, peaceful slumber, from which he never woke again, and died, calmly resting his head on his mother's breast.

I do not wish to dwell on that sad time, and my story is nearly ended. Lady Helena kept to her word and never saw or spoke to her husband again, till the day of her own death, which took place about six months after her darling was laid in his grave. The decline was very gradual, and Dr. Grey said, "If anyone ever died of that mysterious disease called a broken heart, poor Lady Helena did so." When she actually found that her last hour was come, she sent for her husband and pardoned him with her dying breath.

What were Mr. Lawson's feelings on his double bereavement no one can tell; he was probably shocked for the time being, seeing both deaths were remotely attributable to himself. He went away for a time,

and did not return till the end of his first year's widowhood; he had by that time quite recovered his spirits and his self-confident demeanour, and, judging by the tone of his conversation and manners, he seemed as if the sensation of liberty was rather pleasant than otherwise to him.

Mrs. Stuart was still resident in Castleford, though she made occasional absences, but still her post was near her father, while both her boys were sent to school. It soon became apparent to everyone who knew the parties that it was then Mr. Lawson's fixed determination to devote himself once more to his early love, and endeavour to regain her affections, if she could be induced to pardon the past and receive him as a suitor once more. There was much speculation as to his chances of success, and whether the old love would spring up in her heart afresh, as it had evidently done in that of the widowed Bertie Lawson. It need hardly be said that he bore a very

questionable character, and everyone wondered whether Mrs. Stuart would venture on such a marriage.

Those who knew them intimately said that Mr. Lawson pleaded in excuse for all that was past that it was owing to his undying attachment to Alice Young, and that, in having committed the sin and folly of accepting Lady Helena's proffered love, he had become reckless, and his life was quite as miserable as he had made hers. But (he insinuated) with the woman he loved, and had always loved, everything would be entirely changed, he should return to his former self, and with the possession of *her* love his entire nature would become softened and improved, and he should devote his whole life, heart and soul, to retrieve the past and make her happy. He was aware, he said, that he was no longer what he had been in his youthful days, when he first loved Alice Young, but if she would once more accept his love, he would break

through all evil habits, and discard his objectionable friends and acquaintances, and endeavour to retrieve his broken fortunes.

Some people said Mr. Lawson had an eye to Mrs. Stuart's income in these calculations, but there is no reason to doubt he did love, and probably always had loved her for herself, ill as he had behaved to her. People knew that Bertie had proposed to her, but had received no definite answer, all the uncertainty being now on her side, as it had in former times been on his. Mrs. Stuart, it seemed, listened graciously at times to her former lover's suit, but could not bring herself to give a definite answer, or say a word that might compromise herself, though it was thought she still liked him.

After things had gone on in this way for six months after his return (during which time Mrs. Stuart made occasional absences, as if to check pursuit), Bertie's impatient nature could brook no further delay. He then urged Alice, by every per-

suasive argument in his power, to put him out of his suspense, and give him his final and decisive answer. This he fondly believed would be favourable to his suit, as she certainly did appear to listen kindly. However, the fair widow said she felt she should be very weak if she trusted him again, let her sentiments be what they might in his favour—and this admission Bertie Lawson took as a hopeful and pleasant assurance. She said she must take another month to consider his proposal, and also seek the advice of her sister, Mrs. Weston, to whom she was going on a visit; adding that she would write to him at the end of the month.

Mr. Lawson eagerly begged permission to meet her in London, but Mrs. Stuart positively forbade his making any such move, desiring him to rest contented with her promise of writing in a month's time; and with that understanding they parted.

Bertie Lawson felt assured, from her

looks and manner, that her letter would be all that his fondest wishes could desire, and his own looks and manners in consequence underwent a considerable change for the better. In fact he did seem so bent on amending his miserable life, and returning to his early habits and pursuits, that people in general were inclined to condone his past offences, and wish him every success and a happy new life with his old love.

Well, the month of probation passed away—quickly enough to most people, but slowly, no doubt, to the expectant lover. Punctual to the day appeared a letter addressed to Lambert Lawson, Esq., in the fair widow's handwriting. It was eagerly received, and torn open with happy anticipations of coming bliss. Two cards tumbled out. Bertie glanced at them, and then pushed them aside. It was evidently a mistake, for he had never heard the names that were inscribed thereon. On the

smaller card was engraved, "General Sir William Compton," and its companion card bore the name of "Lady Compton." Mr. Lawson turned eagerly to the perusal of the letter, satisfied that, although short, it bore the name of Alice Stuart, whom his heart yearned to behold. He wondered a little at its brevity, but expected to find it proportionately sweet. The first words startled him:

"DEAR MR. LAWSON,

"I have decided as I consider best for my future happiness. I am to be married to-morrow morning, and after the ceremony will enclose the cards, which will tell you all is over for ever between us. You will doubtless, on receiving this, be a little startled, but hardly more so than I was once on a similar occasion. I daresay you have not forgotten it, *nor have I.*

"ALICE STUART."

Verily the wrongs of Alice Young were

fully avenged at that moment, and no doubt Bertie Lawson for the first time fully realized what must have been her sufferings years ago, when, having been led to expect his coming as her promised bridegroom, she received the unlooked-for tidings of his sudden marriage with another. It was a cruel *quid pro quo*, if deliberately forecast and planned as such, but whether it was so or not no one can tell. I can only relate that the effects were as disastrous as his bitterest enemy could desire.

The rest of Bertie Lawson's history is sad and brief. He returned to his evil courses with renewed avidity; he drank to excess (possibly to drown thought), he gambled away his remaining property on the turf, and was finally killed in a steeplechase two or three years after his fatal disappointment. Then the heavily mortgaged property passed away into stranger hands, and the Lawsons were heard of no

more. Lucy married a year or two after her mother's death, and went with her husband into a distant county. The place where the family lived so long is now turned into a farm-house, but it is more generally known as the Old Inn.

RHODA'S BROTHER.

RHODA'S BROTHER.

CHAPTER I.

THE Miss Primroses' "Establishment for Young Ladies" had long been an "institution" in Castleford. They were excellent women, and in every respect well calculated for the situation they filled so long. They were well known and highly respected both in the town and in the surrounding neighbourhood. At the time I speak of they had retired into private life, and the well known school had collapsed with their resignation. I was one of the many who had been brought up there, and always kept up an affection-

ate intercourse with them. In the course of my friendship with the Miss Primroses and intimate acquaintance with some members of their former establishment, I gathered many of the particulars of the little history I am about to record, and which at the time concerned my friends so deeply.

Many people who did not know much about the Miss Primroses (except that they and their mother before them had been at the head of a large flourishing school for many years), wondered that when these ladies saw fit to retire from their work they did not appear to be in more prosperous circumstances. They settled themselves in a small but pleasant house, and their whole establishment consisted of two female servants. It was well known that they had been extremely liberal in all their domestic arrangements in the school, and had done many kind and generous acts, whilst their terms were not high.

But the one all-sufficient cause for their comparative state of poverty was a not uncommon one, namely, that these two good ladies were blessed with a spendthrift brother. His career illustrated a tale too often told to need much notice here, and weak and worthless as he was himself, there would be no satisfaction in recording it; we are all acquainted with such characters.

Charles Primrose was many years younger than his sisters, and therefore it had appeared incumbent on them to act the part of parents to the unprofitable youth. In so doing they had thrown away the greater part of their hardly earned money, and had done their brother no essential good; for, possibly, had they left him to taste the full fruits of his folly in the fate he merited, there might have been better chance of his ultimate reformation. Their last act of kindness was shown in fitting him out for Australia, after all chances in his native country had failed. They did

that at considerable expense, hoping at last to reap some reward in his well-doing, as they had given him the means to settle himself very comfortably in his new and distant home.

He never went further than Melbourne, and spent the money that was given for the purchase of a farm in—I will not say "riotous living," but in living in a style and way utterly unbecoming his position in life. There he married a pretty and penniless girl, whom he left a widow a year afterwards, and she, being without friends or relations, found her way back to England, to throw herself on the charity of her husband's sisters. She brought with her an infant boy, born a few months before she left Melbourne, and hardly a year old when she arrived at Castleford House to claim the hospitality of her unknown relatives. The young widow, who had gone out to Australia on a matrimonial speculation, but avowedly as

a companion to a lady, was by no means an acquisition to their quiet establishment; she was indolent and encroaching, wanting the very best of everything, and contributing nothing whatever on her own part to lighten the burden of her maintenance.

During the year of her married life she had acquired a taste for luxury which her weak husband was delighted to gratify, and she had heard much of his rich maiden sisters at Castleford House, but nothing of the school, and she arrived there believing that she and her son would be received as the future inheritors of their vaunted possessions. She had come over almost penniless; the sale of her husband's effects had hardly enabled her to pay off the many creditors who rose up on every side after his decease. A few kind and charitable friends, who had known Charles Primrose and believed in him in his prosperity, interested themselves in the young widow's behalf, and a sum

was partly rescued and raised by them sufficient to take her and her child over to England, where, in the midst of all her trouble and grief, she boasted she and the young heir would be welcomed by these rich relatives.

Mrs. Charles Primrose was not mistaken in her anticipations of a kind welcome from her husband's sisters, but she was woefully disappointed when she found that Castleford House was merely an educational establishment for young ladies. Poor, pretty, pleasure-loving Delia Primrose could hardly keep her astonishment and lamentations to herself—to think she had come all that way back to England to become a boarder, as it were, in a lady's school, when she had but two years before that quitted an establishment of an inferior grade where she had been sent as a pupil teacher, after which, having neither friends nor home of her own, she had gladly embraced an offer of going as companion to a

lady to Australia, in the hope she might find a husband and a home there! These hopes having succeeded so well, as she believed then, she doubted not that, on her return to those rich relatives, she would again have every chance of making another, and perhaps more, advantageous matrimonial venture. How all these castles in the air were rudely overthrown need not be said, when the whole truth in all its bare and unwelcome reality presented itself to her frivolous mind.

The two kind ladies, who had been sincerely mourning the untimely fate of their worthless but beloved brother, received the young widow with every demonstration of kindness, and looked upon her baby boy as a sort of God-send to recompense them in some degree for his loss. Had Mrs. Charles been in any degree a reasonable woman, there is no doubt she and her child might have found a happy home in Castleford House. But Delia

had a great deal of that low cunning which is supposed to be "the wisdom of the weak," and for some time she dissembled her mortification and disappointment, and never alluded to the higher expectations she had entertained. She was intensely selfish, and, therefore, seized every opportunity for indulgence in the small luxuries that her soul coveted.

One might have thought that, to a woman so utterly destitute, the bare fact of being comfortably lodged, and well, if not luxuriously fed, and having her child thoroughly attended to, without any exertion on her own part, might have sufficed, and been gratefully acknowledged. But, after a time, the quiet routine of school life utterly disgusted and wearied Mrs. Charles Primrose. She never offered in the slightest way to assist either in the tuition of the school or in walking out with the pupils. She entrenched herself as far as she was able in a stronghold of listless

self-indulgence, making her former experience of a life of expensive pleasure (although so short) her excuse for the many demands she made both on the forbearance and on the liberality of her sisters-in-law. She carefully hid away every reminiscence of her early life as a pupil teacher in a very inferior boarding-school, even professing perfect ignorance of all the duties that were involved in such a situation.

Time went on, and Mrs. Charles gradually asserted more loudly her many claims to extra and expensive indulgences; her health, she declared, required so many little things that were not to be found at Castleford House; besides, she was too delicate to walk in the Winter—would her dear sisters allow her to order a carriage occasionally? She would not care for herself alone, but her poor boy, who would have been so tenderly cared for had he enjoyed the blessing of a father. Thus

the Miss Primroses were drawn into many unlooked-for expenses to gratify the whims of their selfish and self-indulgent sister-in-law; but she was poor Charlie's widow, and had (according to her own account) been so differently brought up.

The terms at Castleford House were by no means high, so, after a time, money went out faster than it came in. Mrs. Delia found it expedient for her health's sake to dine late—she had always been used to it in poor papa's time, as well as in Charlie's; but then she could never give any particular account of poor papa or his family, or tell where all her rich relations had vanished to. She was so young when she married, and everyone no doubt had forgotten her since her papa's death and her sad loss of poor Charlie.

Miss Primrose, however, was no fool, except when the great kindness of her heart blinded her, and in this case she resolutely shut her eyes and ears to every-

thing that might militate against her sister-in-law. The younger sister, Martha, was quick and clever, and very warm-hearted, and she, too, tried hard to believe in Delia, with all her pretensions and affectation; but, after a time, her natural acuteness got the better of her indulgent blindness, and then began a very unpleasant time for the delicate Delia.

Miss Martha, who ruled the house, forbade all expensive luxuries for the sole use of Mrs. Charles; if she liked to dine when she and her sister supped with the girls, well and good, but Martha declared she could not afford another servant solely to attend to her caprices.

The weak woman's strong point was in her boy, whom she tried early to enlist in her cause in any little differences with his aunts, but happily the boy's better nature prevailed even there. It was strange that a child, of two parents so weak and worthless, should have been gifted as that boy

was with a more than usual share of strength and discrimination of character; he was not of a very loving nature in general, but very firm and true when his affections were once fixed.

At an early age he began to understand the worth of his two maiden aunts' characters, and, it is to be hoped, not *all* the littleness and selfishness of his mother's. Possibly he might have regarded her faults as amiable weaknesses, and her jealousy of his love for his aunts as affection for himself—loving him, as it were, "not wisely, but too well." His aunts prevailed on his weak mother with some difficulty to let the boy be placed in a good school some distance from Castleford; he begged so hard to be allowed to go that the foolish woman had to give way at last.

Young Ralph Primrose did very well there; he was a steady, painstaking boy, unlike either father or mother. So time went on, and Ralph continued at the same school,

only coming home for the holidays twice a year. Mrs. Charles Primrose meanwhile settled down at Castleford House, having no other home to go to, and no money to maintain either herself or child; she made a virtue of necessity, and accepted all the benefits her sisters-in-law bestowed upon them both, as a tribute due to her many superior qualifications.

It may be supposed that two women so quick-sighted and intelligent as Mary and Martha Primrose, could not live many years in the same house with their brother's widow without perceiving the extreme shallowness and selfishness of the fair Delia's natural character.

Had these good women been living alone, as they did afterwards, such a third person as Mrs. Charles would have been an almost insupportable infliction upon their kindness and forbearance. But in a large establishment such as that at Castleford House, and living as they did in the

midst of their pupils, and in hourly intercourse with them at all times of the day, there was ample space and room for Mrs. Charles to display her graces and air her opinions without coming much in contact with the elder ladies. So Delia improved the liberty afforded her by relating, both to the resident governesses and elder girls, the oft-told tales of her Melbourne splendour, as well as the imaginative ones of her family importance in the early days of her youth and after years till the time of her marriage.

Now it so happened that both the Miss Primroses, being truth itself, never doubted Delia's declarations in regard to the splendours of her paternal residence and former prosperity, only wondering that none of her own family had given her a welcome home. But to account for this patent fact, Mrs. Charles had adduced her father's death, and her going out to Australia in consequence, and the after dispersion of her

family and loss of fortune owing to some gigantic mercantile failure, of which she was unable to record any minute particulars.

CHAPTER II.

THUS these two amiable ladies gave due credence to the younger sister's statement, only allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration, to which they could not but perceive that the fair Delia was addicted; but, on the whole, they believed her story, and treated her with a good deal of indulgence on that account. However, a day came when Mrs. Charles's imaginary honours were ruthlessly swept away, and her fictitious tales robbed of all their credibility.

It chanced that, after Delia and her son had been the recipients of the Miss Primroses' bounty for some years, a further call was made upon their well-

known liberality and kindness. A distant cousin (whose mother they had known in early life, but lost sight of after her marriage) wrote to her unknown cousins to ask their advice and assistance on behalf of an only daughter, who, with a younger boy, was left quite dependent on her very slender means. Mrs. Selby told her cousins she had married early in life an artist of considerable talent, and that for some years they were well and comfortably off, but for the last two or three years failing health and eyesight had almost incapacitated him from pursuing his professional labours—that she had lately been left a widow, and after disposing of her husband's pictures and effects, she found herself reduced to a very narrow income. She did not, however, write to the Miss Primroses to beg for pecuniary assistance, but only to ask if they could help her by taking her daughter as a pupil-teacher into their school, or by recommending her to some situation

of that kind. Mrs. Selby said she made the request with more confidence, as her daughter, now fifteen years of age, would be found a very useful assistant both in the drawing department and in speaking Italian, which she understood as well as her own tongue from having, a few years back, spent two or three years, in her father's lifetime, in Italy. Mrs. Selby said, in addition, that it was only on account of her daughter's youth that she did not seek a situation as governess for her, and she wished her to have the benefit of such tuition herself as she could receive in a good school for two or three years before she undertook to teach others, and she was sure, if the Miss Primroses were inclined to give Rhoda the benefit of a trial in their establishment, they would find her steady and sweet-tempered, and also quick and intelligent.

This account (giving due allowance for a mother's partiality) pleased both Mary

and Martha Primrose, and a correspondence was entered into on the subject. It ended, after a very satisfactory interview in London, where Miss Martha went to be introduced to both her cousins, in a hearty acceptance of the proffered services of Rhoda Selby, with the promise of her enjoying every opportunity at Castleford House of completing her own education. Thus Rhoda came, and was soon duly installed in her new offices of drawing-mistress to the younger girls, and of Italian teacher to all the school.

There was only one voice raised against the introduction of this new element into the Primrose household, and that was Mrs. Charles's. She had a mean little jealousy of her sisters-in-law extending their liberality to others save herself and her son. She dared not avow this feeling openly; she only hinted at various objections which might probably arise, such as, so young a girl could not be trusted to teach others,

and no one would like to obey her, and her sisters might find this Miss Rhoda Selby by no means so competent a teacher as her mother represented; possibly the drawings and sketches that were sent for inspection were her father's doing, and not her own, and if the Miss Primroses once got this girl into their house, they might find it difficult to get rid of her, with all the claims of cousinship her mother was so eager to advance.

When Mrs. Charles had uttered her last and greatest objection, it was received by Martha Primrose with a quiet smile, and she only answered she hoped neither she nor her sister would ever wish to disregard the claims of relationship, or refuse to grant any benefits or privileges which might result from such considerations, and which, in the present instance, they were very well inclined to extend to Rhoda Selby. Delia's cheek grew a little redder than usual at what she considered a covert

attack upon her own privileges as a near relative, but which had possibly never entered any head to imagine but her own.

So Rhoda came to Castleford, and everyone, with the one exception, considered her a very pleasant addition to the establishment. She was a bright, good-looking, graceful girl, with very simple manners, but perfectly self-possessed, and with a good deal of quiet decision of character, the result of early training under a clever father and a somewhat indolent and indulgent mother. Soon after she first came, the *contretemps* occurred to which I have already alluded—the taking down of Mrs. Charles Primrose from her strongholds of pride and fictitious self-importance. It happened, I was told, in this way: Two or three evenings after Rhoda's arrival, Mrs. Charles joined the family party (which included several of the elder girls and the French and music governesses), having previously absented herself on the pretence of

a cold, or for some reason best known to herself. Perhaps she felt unwilling to show any *empressement* in welcoming the girl she evidently looked upon already in the light of a rival, and of whose claims on the kindness of the Miss Primroses she felt jealous. However that might be, it was not till the third evening that Mrs. Charles Primrose entered the drawing-room, after the rest of the party already mentioned had come up from supper, Delia having taken that meal in her own room, dignifying the proceeding by calling it her dinner. She seated herself languidly on a sofa, and then looked round for the expected introduction, and the next minute Mary Primrose, in answer to the look, brought Rhoda up to her, saying,

"You will be glad to make the acquaintance of our Cousin Rhoda; her coming has been a great pleasure to us all, and I feel sure you will share in it."

Upon this good-natured little speech,

Mrs. Charles raised her eyes, as if with some effort, and stretched out a chilly little hand, saying,

"How do you do, Miss Selby? I dare-say you feel rather strange amongst so many new faces," and then her voice sank as if fatigued with the effort of welcoming the new-comer.

Rhoda, on her part, seemed all unconscious of any omission or want of cordiality on the languid lady's side, possibly giving her due credit for the cold she affected, but the girl took Mrs. Charles's hand and kept it in hers for a minute, whilst she said, in a pleasant, friendly tone,

"Oh no, no one can feel strange here, and I am very glad to see you; I have been wishing so for you to come down. I hope you are better?"

"You are very good!" returned Delia, in a very frigid tone, adding, with an affected little laugh, "But as I am quite a stranger to you at present, I ought to feel

very much obliged to you for all the flattering interest you express on my behalf."

Rhoda coloured a little at this implied imputation on her sincerity, but hastened to explain, saying,

"I daresay you can only think of *me* as a stranger; but I have so often heard mamma speak of her friend Delia Martyn (that was your name, was it not?), and you must remember my mamma?"

Delia coloured furiously as she answered,

"No, indeed; and I am sure I never saw your mamma in my life, and it is altogether a mistake."

"Oh no, it cannot be; she was Helen Davis, and she was a fellow pupil-teacher with you at the same orphan school where you and she were brought up; and she told me you went from there as companion to some lady to Australia, and there met and married our cousin Charles Primrose—

she could not be mistaken, though you may possibly have forgotten her."

All this was said with the utmost simplicity, and in total absence of all intention of offence or suspicion that the truth revealed could be so unpalatable as it undoubtedly was to the lady who received it, and tried to turn it off with a laugh and a disclaimer, saying, "What odd mistakes people do make in claiming acquaintances," with various other half-uttered sentences, which were duly noted, but not altogether credited by the spectators of this little scene. The Miss Primroses also heard, but hazarded no remark, and the rest of the company no doubt made their private comments on the case, but kept discreet silence, whilst Rhoda, unconscious of having sprung such a mine, fell back from Delia's sofa and made no further claims on her acquaintance. Perhaps she charitably supposed that the former friendship with her mother was forgotten

by Mrs. Charles Primrose in the variety of people she had seen since. Nevertheless, everyone from that day forth fully believed in the fact of Mrs. Charles's early career as revealed by Rhoda Selby.

It may be supposed that from that time forth no good will ever existed in Mrs. Charles's heart towards the unlucky Rhoda. The feeling, however, had not much opportunity for display, as the two had nothing in common in the daily routine of their quiet lives. Still, where genuine ill-will exists, and two people are living together under the same roof, it would be difficult to prevent all manifestation of the sentiment.

Thus Rhoda Selby, by some subtle instinct, became dimly conscious that she was no favourite with Mrs. Charles. Probably that lady had given some hint of the nature of her feelings towards the girl to other members of the establishment, and in the ebb and flow of school gossip

some version of the unfriendly opinion had reached Rhoda's ears. Now Rhoda was a good girl, conscientious and amiable in the main, but by no means perfection, and no doubt she naturally resented an unkindness for which she could assign no possible reason; and the result of that feeling was shown in her avoidance of all communication with Delia, and if they were thrown together, or Mrs. Charles gave the young teacher the benefit of her opinion on any subject, by receiving those advances in a silent, or, as it might be termed, as she supposed, a scornful spirit; still there was no outbreak of the feeling that each entertained towards the other, and Rhoda was naturally of a bright, happy temper, so she probably thought very little about Mrs. Charles and her dislike, unless when forced upon her notice.

The two elder ladies grew very fond of Rhoda, and by the time she had been with them three years, found her assistance so

valuable that they asked her to remain, no longer as a pupil-teacher, but as one of the lady-assistants in the school, with a suitable salary. Up to that time Rhoda had always gone home and spent her holidays with her mother, but the first Summer holidays after she became one of the heads of the establishment she was requested to remain at least for a part of the time, as one of the Miss Primroses was going from home on a visit to a former pupil.

Thus it happened that Rhoda for the first time made the acquaintance of Ralph Primrose. That young man had done well at school, and had since, at his own wish, been articled to a land-surveyor in a neighbouring town, and had been but little at his aunt's house, and then always during the holiday time, the Miss Primroses considering that, now the boy had become a man, it was desirable that he should be

as little seen and heard of as possible in their establishment for "young ladies."

Ralph was at that time one or two and twenty years old, fairly good-looking, with pleasant, unaffected manners. His aunts were proud and fond of him; they had done everything for him as boy and man, and they were well satisfied that their kind offices had not been thrown away. The good women looked upon him and his future success as their one object in life, and were ready to make any sacrifice to ensure his well-doing. The one modest object of their ambition was to see Ralph set up in their native town in a flourishing business on his own account. There seemed a possibility of this occurring before long, as an old friend and acquaintance of theirs, who had long had an excellent business as agent and land-surveyor, was growing old, and was desirous of taking into partnership some steady, clever

young man, brought up to his business, and able to give a good premium to secure the situation.

No one was better pleased at this prospect than Ralph's mother—not, indeed, solely on her son's account, though she loved him as well as her weak, selfish heart permitted her to do, but its great recommendation was that it promised an independence and all its blessings and comforts to herself. She was even content to wait two or three years, as it might be, before she could hope to be installed as mistress in her son's house. She had become (although habituated to the rules and routine of the school) thoroughly weary of them. There was little wonder that she should be so, for, although deriving every comfort she possessed from its resources, yet she had never taken the slightest interest in any of its proceedings, or in any of the young members of the miniature world around. Wrapped up in

self, and its petty cares and requirements, all beyond was a blank to her. She entertained no gratitude to her husband's sisters for all they had done for her, and only felt inclined to quarrel with them for not giving her every luxury her covetous soul craved.

As for her child, she simply looked upon all they did for him as a bounden duty on their part, and as if it were incumbent on them to toil for and provide for him, no matter what sacrifice they might make to secure the high premium that was demanded for Ralph's admittance into Mr. Seaford's office, as his present partner and prospective successor. If their future comforts were to be curtailed by such a large outlay, Mrs. Charles would only ask scornfully, "What *could* two old maids like them require, when the infirmities of age might oblige them to retire, beyond a roof to cover them and daily bread to sustain their lives?" I had heard the subject broached by her, and knew the sentiments

she entertained, and have here recorded.

Ralph Primrose was a dutiful and affectionate son; he shut his eyes to his mother's many failings, and covered them with the garment of filial reverence and forbearance; he still cherished the early love and tender admiration he used to feel as a little child towards his pretty, young mamma. Her petting and foolish indulgence had not spoilt him, happily, and he, on his part, looked forward to the time when he might be able to give his mother a home and surround her with every luxury and comfort she urgently demanded. Perhaps in his young heart he did not realise all his aunts had done, and were disposed to do, for him; no doubt he felt grateful after a way, but he could not be aware of the extent of his many obligations; they had been so quietly bestowed, that they were received more as matter of course than of favour, for his mother would expatiate to him on the riches his

aunts were accumulating, and tell him he was the "rightful heir" to whatever they might possess, and it was the least they could do to set him out in life to earn his own maintenance comfortably therein. She had often in early life made the boy the recipient of her peevish complaints, and he was sometimes tempted, in consequence, to look upon his aunts as wanting in kindness and consideration towards his mother; but that was only as a child, for as the young Ralph grew older, he was too honest and practical not to see that there might be two sides to every question; and the result of his investigations was—not to lessen his love for his mother, but to increase his consideration for his aunts.

CHAPTER III.

THE name of Rhoda Selby was quite as familiar to Ralph Primrose as his was to her, only with this slight difference—that Rhoda's had an unpleasant association in the young man's mind, as a person disagreeable and disrespectful to his mother; whilst that of Ralph had so often been sounded in the girl's ear as an embodiment of every perfection, mental and bodily, under the sun. Rhoda had, in the first instance, been much disappointed at the curtailment of her expected holiday; she had just received the first instalment of her salary—ten pounds, out of the forty that would come to her in the course of the year, and was anxiously longing to

take it home to her mother, and present it as an earnest of future independence. However, she readily ceded her wishes to her good friends' convenience; for Cousin Mary had been in failing health of late, and the change would do her good, and she would be of use in helping Martha in various ways during her sister's absence.

So the girl cheerfully put aside her own wishes, and prepared to do duty with Miss Martha, and, alas! Mrs. Charles Primrose. No doubt the prospect of such a near and daily association with the latter may have made the duty appear a little more onerous. However, we are told that doing one's duty will bring its own reward. And in Rhoda's case perhaps the old saying was for a time verified, though not exactly in the way anticipated.

Mrs. Charles Primrose exerted herself to walk down to the station to meet her son the day and hour he was expected at Castleford, and then the mother and son

had a pleasant little chat together on their way home. In the course of Mrs. Charles's communications, amongst other things she told Ralph that they had that "horrid girl" left with them for the holidays, or a part of them. This vague piece of information was received by her son with a look of inquiry, and the question,

"What horrid girl do you mean?"

"Oh! you must remember all I have told you about that Rhoda Selby! Well, I mean that she is a horrid girl, for she always seems most disagreeable to me."

Then Ralph asked some further questions, one of which of course was whether the obnoxious young lady was good-looking, and the reply given was—

"*I* don't think her in the least so. She is tall and dark, and a great deal too pale."

NowMrs.Charles was, or rather had been, small and fair, with a beautiful colour in youth, which, however, had become of late years much deeper at times than was at all

becoming, whilst her *petite* figure had expanded till its sylph-like proportions were entirely obliterated. Happily for the lady's peace of mind she was for the most part unconscious of these unbecoming alterations, and still regarded herself as the proper standard of height and size, and the model of grace and beauty.

After pondering awhile over his mother's description of Rhoda, Ralph came to the conclusion that perhaps it would be more lively to have a "horrid girl" staying in the house than to be reduced, as usual, to the society of his aunt and mother —all good enough in their various ways, but wanting, perhaps, the attractive piquancy that would attend his domestication with his mother's *bête noire*, Miss Rhoda Selby. He only remarked, in answer, that as the girl was there they had better put up with her, and if his mother found her very disagreeable, she would have him as a companion to turn to at all times.

Mrs. Charles admitted that would be a comfort, but at the same time expressed a fear lest the "horrid girl" should try to seize on Ralph as her own companion.

"For," said Mrs. Charles, "Miss Rhoda is very decided, if she likes to do anything, and I have no doubt she will introduce herself to you as a *cousin*, and be very attentive to you as well."

Ralph laughed as he answered—

"I fear she will not benefit much from the relationship, but I will submit to the introduction with the best grace in my power."

This anticipated introduction came about in a way as little expected as it was devoid of all ceremony, and occurred thus: Soon after Ralph reached the house, having seen and talked to his aunt Martha for a few minutes, he went out, according to his custom, to look for his portmanteau, and take it up to his own room. A porter had just deposited it in the passage, and after

paying the man, Ralph took it up and carried it towards the stairs. Now it so happened that Rhoda was in the act of coming down those broad steps from an upper story, bearing with her a huge pile of muslin curtains that her cousin Martha had committed to her care; and coming quickly along with her large but light burden, was unmindful of anything except what she held in her hands and arms.

Ralph at the same moment turned the corner of the long passage with his more weighty encumbrance, and was also fully engrossed with its safe conveyance, and thus it happened that at the foot of the stairs a collision occurred between the two parties ascending and descending, the immediate effect of which was to send the pile of curtains flying in all directions, and to take Ralph and his portmanteau very considerably aback.

Rhoda was the first to recover from the shock of this unexpected encounter, and

hardly seeing or knowing how it had occurred, gave vent to her annoyance in two or three words, exclaiming,

"How very awkward!"

Then Ralph, having recovered his equilibrium, began to apologise, saying, "I beg your pardon—do let me help you!" After that, as he saw his opponent more clearly, he perceived a tall, graceful girl, with pretty dark eyes and hair and a delicate complexion, a little raised at that moment from the effect of the surprise and shock. He began to surmise that it was the "horrid girl" who stood before him, so, to make assurance doubly sure, he ventured on the inquiry—"Miss Selby, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered the young lady; "and you, I suppose, are Mr. Ralph Primrose?"

"Yes, I am Ralph," he answered readily, whilst he collected Rhoda's scattered goods, and then said—"It was rather an awkward meeting, as you observed. I only hope you are not hurt?"

"No, I was not touched, and my large, unwieldy parcel is none the worse for its overthrow."

"That is all right," said Ralph, as he watched the girl carefully re-adjusting the pile she had been carrying, thought it was strange his mother did not think her pretty, and then imagined that perhaps she might be mistaken about her in other ways, for he perceived she had a pleasant, frank expression of countenance, and, after the first shock was over, seemed in no ways either discomposed or angry at the *contre-temps*. "And now," he continued, wishing to improve the occason, "I hope you will forgive me."

Rhoda looked up quietly, and said very simply,

"Of course you could not help it, nor could I, so, if there is any question of forgiveness in the case, it must be mutual."

"Yes, mutual," responded Ralph, "and I hope we may shake hands in ratification

of the same. You are aware, I suppose, that I am a cousin of yours?"

"Are you?" she answered; adding, "I think the cousinship must be worn out before it reaches us—at least, I think that is your mother's idea."

"Never mind," said the young man; "if we are not cousins, let us be friends, for cousins are not always friends, you know." And then the young people laughed with the freemasonry of youth and good spirits, and shook hands over the compact.

This friendship, begun in so untoward a manner, remained unbroken. The progress of it was narrowly watched by Ralph's mother; she felt jealous and uneasy that the girl she so thoroughly disliked should be on such pleasant, easy terms with her son. She fancied she had a first right to his attentions and society; as to his actual "affection," that, of course, was entirely her own, but she could not bear to see the two laughing and talking

together over things in which she had no part. Poor Mrs. Charles was perpetually intruding herself into their little jests and trifling talk, peevishly asking what they found to laugh so foolishly about; and then, if she wanted to walk, she wished Ralph would come with her instead of wasting all his time doing nothing. She would also hint that it was the "horrid girl" who tried to take her son away from her, and the occupations he used to find so much pleasure in when staying there before, and which were far more improving.

But those were Summer days then—long, long, bright, beautiful July days! and the young people would manage to make their escape on protracted rambles in the woods and fields, and never dreamt that they could in so doing give any cause for displeasure or discussion. Miss Martha looked on this new-born friendship with kindness and toleration; she had seen and thought little of love or matrimony, such

important matters had never disturbed the even tenor of her life and imagination; she knew that her sister Mary, when quite young, had had a love-affair, which ended unhappily for her, but Martha always considered fortunately for herself, in that it kept her sister at home and with her to the end of their united lives. But at the time it occurred Mary was eighteen and Martha but twelve, so she had been only an outside spectator of that mysterious epoch in a woman's life which her sister was passing through—first in all the brightness of hope and joy, and then ending in sadness and desertion. Happily for Martha, no such experience had ever lightened or darkened her existence. It seemed very natural to her that the two cousins, as she fancied them, should like to walk about together, and linger in the large, old-fashioned garden in the evening, and prefer sitting under the trees there, although surrounded

by high walls, to remaining in the warm parlour by lamp-light.

But a new source of interest soon sprang up, more fully to engross their time. Ralph had some little idea of drawing, and longed to perfect himself still more in that fascinating art; and as he soon became aware of Rhoda's talent and proficiency in drawing, as well as her skill in imparting instruction, it increased his desire to improve the small capacity he had already shown; he declared also that a more perfect knowledge of drawing would be essentially useful to him in the profession he had chosen.

As this was said in his mother's presence, whilst he urged Rhoda to take him as a pupil, Mrs. Charles told him he had better seek the instruction he considered himself in need of at the hands of some really competent artist; as though young ladies might be able to teach children the rudiments of the art, she could not consider

them capable of instructing men. Rhoda understood this hint, and quietly asked Mrs. Charles if she remembered Angelica Kaufmann and other women who had attained celebrity as artists. Now it happened unfortunately that Mrs. Charles was blissfully innocent of all such knowledge; what little she had learnt as a pupil-teacher, in a very small second-rate school, had been entirely forgotten in the course of the many years that had followed (in which the fair Delia's last thought was that of improving her mind). So, as she could find no becoming answer to that "horrid girl's" unpleasant question, she only replied, very tartly,

"I daresay, Miss Selby, you consider yourself a first-rate artist, but as I have seen more of the world and the things in it than you have done, I must repeat my wish that, if my son desires to improve his talent for drawing, he will do so with some distinguished painter as an eligible instructor."

Ralph laughed as he said he was afraid that no distinguished artist would have anything to say to him and his crude attempts at drawing, but as Rhoda had kindly volunteered to give him a few hints on the subject, he could only avail himself of such a favourable opportunity with the utmost gratitude. Mrs. Charles was half frantic with anger and jealousy; she followed the amateur artists about, and interrupted their pursuits by every possible device, till Rhoda could hardly resist saying she thought her a "horrid woman."

Nevertheless where there is a will there is a way, and Ralph and Rhoda found various pleasant ones for themselves, and were generally successful in eluding the vigilance of Mrs. Charles, and in selecting some charming shady nook where they could continue their studies undisturbed.

This state of things had lasted over the month, the end of which was to be the commencement of Rhoda's Summer holi-

day. That being the case, Miss Mary Primrose came home. Mrs. Charles hailed her sister-in-law's return with unusual demonstrations of satisfaction. She was almost affectionate in the unwonted cordiality of her greeting.

"And now," said she the next day to Rhoda—"and now, Miss Selby, you can be set at liberty. Oh! how you must long to go home to your mother—and your brother. You have a brother, I believe?"

"I believe so too," answered Rhoda, in what Mrs. Charles called her scornful manner, but which had generally the effect of silencing her, at least for a time. She took her revenge, however, in calling Miss Mary's attention to the wandering pair, and bespeaking her interference with what she called their foolish philandering, not scrupling to intimate that Rhoda was the principal offender, in that, observing Ralph's taste for drawing, she offered to give him instruction in sketching, so that

whole days were spent in that occupation, to the exclusion of every other.

In consequence of these observations, Miss Primrose turned her attention to the offending pair. She watched them quietly for two or three days, and at the end of that time she called Rhoda into her own little sanctum; she kissed her and said,

"Now, Rhoda, dear, you have been most kind and helpful to Martha whilst I have been away, and it is high time you should have your holiday, and gladden your mother's heart with a sight of you. So write, dear, this afternoon, and tell her you will be in London to-morrow evening. A friend of mine is going up, and it will be pleasant for you to travel with her."

Rhoda kissed her kind old friend, and thanked her with her lips, but it seemed strange and appalling to the girl that her heart refused to echo the words. She felt dimly conscious that she would rather remain where she was than take the proposed

journey the next day; and then she asked herself was it possible that a few short weeks spent with an utter stranger had the fatal power to supersede all the past pleasures of home, and stifle filial gratitude and affection? However, so it was; spite of vain longings, self-upbraidings, and all the variety of contrary feelings of which poor Rhoda was sensible, that same afternoon her fate was fixed. She was to bid farewell to all the new and dear delights of the past four weeks, in the old schoolhouse, and go home to her loving, anxious mother, who was so eagerly counting the days of her absence, and looking forward to the time of her return.

Poor Rhoda felt herself a very monster of ingratitude and unkindness, and yet—and yet she had been so happy in her quiet life that sweet Summer holiday. Rhoda looked anxiously that day for the time when their little home party would assemble in the evening, and she should see

Ralph again, and be able to judge how he had taken the tidings of her approaching departure the next day.

Just before she was called as usual to make the tea, she went to the hall-door to look round on the scene of past happiness in the dear, dull, old garden; she was met there by the elder Miss Primrose, who had been walking with her nephew round the garden; he came up to her immediately, and said,

"I have heard the bad news that you leave us to-morrow, Rhoda; but I shall be very diligent in your absence, and hope to have some masterly sketches to show you when we meet again; and then, with much earnestness, he added—"I can never thank you enough for all your efforts to make me an artist; it has been a very happy time, but it is all over now. I am going into Scotland next week; my good aunt has made a very advantageous arrangement for me there with a friend of hers—only

for a short time, and after that I shall hope to come back to this dear old town, and set to work in earnest with Mr. Seaford; till then you must remember your cousin friend, and our friendly compact at the foot of the stairs."

Rhoda saw and understood that this was meant as a farewell. Ralph said no more to her, and he was absent when she took her departure the next day.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was some weeks before Rhoda returned to Castleford and her duties in the school; she had been delayed by her mother's illness, and when she returned she was looking ill and out of spirits, which was easily accounted for, as it appeared she had had a very anxious time during her holidays, both on her mother's account and on her young brother's also. Rhoda had offered to remain entirely at home, but Mrs. Selby would not hear of her making so great a sacrifice, though, as she said, if she grew really worse, she would not scruple to call her home.

It was two years, however, before that

summons came, and then Mrs. Selby very unwillingly consented that Rhoda should relinquish her situation at the school, and come and live entirely at home—at least for a time, for her presence there was greatly needed. Those two years had been very uneventful ones in Rhoda's life; unfortunately the girl cherished with too much tenacity the recollection of the one happy month she had passed in that old school-house. It had been certainly a very bright spot in her monotonous life, but there had been no renewal of that companionship which had given it all its charm. Ralph Primrose had never visited his aunt's house since that Summer; he had, however, been working hard in Scotland, and made the best use of his time there, not even affording himself the indulgence of a single holiday home, or at any time deputing his work to another hand. Ralph had the satisfaction of bringing home a certain sum of money, and this he tendered, in

all grateful acknowledgment, to his aunts. They had to remind him, as they refused to accept it, that he was the child of their adoption, besides being their dearly loved nephew, and the only son of a brother they had loved so dearly and mourned so deeply.

Thus the premium was paid to Mr. Seaford by the two Miss Primroses, who had long been laying by for that express purpose, and in so doing their own means as to the future were greatly crippled; nevertheless, the sacrifice was made in a spirit of joy and thanksgiving.

Mrs. Charles looked on, and heard all her son had to say, and then expressed her opinion that she was glad his aunts had shown more sense of what was right than he had done; no doubt they saw and felt it would only be right and proper, if Ralph had any money in hand, to give it to his own mother, who was so entirely destitute, and not to his aunts, who must

be "rolling in riches." Although Ralph acted in some degree on this hint, and gave a certain sum to his mother, he was prudent enough to retain a portion for his own needs, as he could not expect to receive any remuneration for some little time from Mr. Seaford.

It was settled that Ralph should at once take up his abode in Mr. Seaford's office; there was a very comfortable house attached to it, in which the old gentleman at that time lived, but which he was intending to vacate for a separate dwelling of his own about a mile out of the town. It was no doubt a subject of anxiety with him to ascertain how his young partner went on, and it was his intention not to leave him to himself (well as he thought of him) until he was fully convinced that Ralph was entirely fitted to go alone, and manage the extensive business without his superintendence.

Mrs. Charles Primrose was in a perfect

fever of anxiety for the time to come when Mr. Seaford would remove himself from the office house, and give her son the long-desired opportunity of offering such a comfortable home to his mother. Delia had no delicacy in talking on the subject to her sisters-in-law, and proclaiming aloud her joy at the prospect of their approaching separation. She never *expressed*, and, it may be presumed, *felt* no gratitude to them for all they had done and sacrificed for her son, and had, in fact, bestowed on him the means of securing that longed-for home of independence for which her soul had so often yearned. She was utterly callous and selfish, and as her sympathies were never exercised on others, they appeared at last to centre entirely on herself, even to the exclusion of the son she professed to love so well. Her whole thoughts and talk ran upon "*my* house," and all she intended to do in "my house." She never thought of it as her son's house, which

little oversight made Miss Martha remark,

"But what will you do, Delia, when Ralph brings a wife home to his house?"

This suggestion was received with intense contempt, returning the query with another—

"A wife, indeed!—and what should he want with a wife when he will have his mother with him?"

Martha ventured one more little reminder, saying,

"Yes, a mother is a great consideration, no doubt, or ought to be; still every mother must look forward with pleasure to her son's being happily settled with a nice wife."

To this Mrs. Charles made no direct reply, but indulged in sundry mutterings about old maids knowing so much about wives and mothers!

Ralph settled down very comfortably in his new home and life; and before long the elder partner expressed himself so well

satisfied, that he thought he might withdraw himself to his country house, only driving in every other day to see how matters were going on; and after a month or two of such supervision, the good man betook himself more entirely to his rural pleasures, and only visited the office in the course of some weeks, more or less, according to his inclination and occupations elsewhere.

A year or two passed quietly away. Ralph worked hard, and his mother came and established herself at the head of his household, and would have launched out into all kinds of lavish expenditure, had he not, with a strong hand and stronger will, withheld her.

Mrs. Charles fretted and fumed, and made herself as disagreeable as she dared to do, but was brought into submission at last. Only Ralph found his mother's claims so importunate as regarded her own dress, and other requirements, that al-

though he had placed a bound she dared not pass as to household expenses, he found himself so constantly called upon to give, and in that case so weak to deny, that it appeared to him money came in slower than it went out. So, as he has since said, what chance was there, under those circumstances, of his looking out for a wife? But after a time a strong temptation came in his way in that respect.

The Miss Primroses meanwhile had made up their minds to retire. Mary had been in failing health for some time, and, her doctor said, required perfect rest of mind and body. Both she and Martha missed Rhoda every day and every hour, for she had become as it were their right hand. They tried to replace her in various ways, but without success. Their nephew was at last happily and independently placed in the world, and finally, they were in consequence delivered from the incubus of Mrs. Charles's perpetual presence, and relieved

from all care for her future maintenance. They felt that the time had come when they need consider only themselves and their own inclination. So the result was that, after due notice, they gave up their school, and refusing to sell the good will, they parted with the old house at some loss to themselves, and then retired into the "modest mansion" of which I have spoken.

Soon after they had settled themselves there they received a letter from Rhoda, in great trouble, and telling them of her mother's death, after long months and years of suffering, saying her small annuity ended with her life, and that she had now her brother as well as herself to maintain by her own exertions. She said she had done a little in the way of earning money by the sale of her drawings, but that her mother's health had prevented her from taking pupils at home, or going out to them; now she was anxious to do something in that way, and wrote to her kind

old friends for their advice on the subject; adding, she had quite enough money still for all present expenses, and to remove herself and brother, if they thought she had a better chance elsewhere than where she was.

The answer to this letter to the Miss Primroses was a cordial invitation to Rhoda to come to them at once, and then she could think about where she would like to live, but they much recommended her to try Castleford, saying, in the meantime, she must come and bring her brother on a visit.

It happened that, a few days after this invitation was despatched, I met Mrs. Charles Primrose coming from her sisters' house, whither, in fact, I was bound; she had such an unmistakable look of annoyance, amounting to distress on her countenance, and her usual high colour was so much deepened, that I could not help asking her (after the usual salutations had been exchanged) whether there was anything

amiss at the Miss Primroses', hoping also that her son was well. That natural inquiry set the lady's tongue going faster than it was almost possible to follow, but I understood her to say that she had been worried and distressed beyond all endurance that morning—that her sisters-in-law were most regardless of her feelings, and her son's interests as well as her own.

"In what way, my dear Mrs. Primrose?" was the natural sequence to this tirade.

"Oh, I suppose you have not heard, but they have been foolish and inconsiderate enough to bring that 'horrid girl,' or rather woman, as Rhoda Selby is now, back to Castleford, and not content with that, they must ask her and a brother, whom no one knows anything about, to come and take up their abode in their house for as long as it might suit their convenience to remain. Did you ever hear such mad conduct?"

"Well, I cannot look at things exactly

in that light, for you must remember Rhoda is a sort of relation, and they were very fond of her, and regretted her being obliged to leave, so surely it is not quite unnatural that, now the poor girl is left so friendless, they should ask her—and her brother also, if they like—to pay them a little visit?—it cannot interfere with anyone's comforts or fancies, their doing so."

"Fancies!—indeed, my dear Mrs. Grey, there is no fancy, unhappily, in the case; I know that that Miss Selby tried all her arts to ensnare my son four years ago, when she was unfortunately left to spend the holidays with Martha and myself at that hateful school. What I suffered that time makes me tremble to look back upon."

"But apparently no harm came of it."

"That was not Miss Rhoda's fault; she made up to Ralph in the most barefaced way, and now she is coming back bent on doing all the mischief in her power."

"But if your son does not—as you say—care for Rhoda Selby, what harm can possibly come of the poor girl's coming here?—it is very natural that she should do so, and I hope she will get plenty of pupils, if that is her object."

"Plenty of fools!" exclaimed Mrs. Charles, in high indignation, and continuing, in an angry tone—"And my precious sisters-in-law at the head of them! asking her to come and stay in their own house, where Ralph is perpetually dropping in; and then, under pretence of drawing or sketching, or some other rubbish, she will be drawing him on to go out and tramp all over the country with her, as she used to to do in the days I have not forgotten."

"We will hope better things now Rhoda is older, and her time will, no doubt, be too fully occupied to have much leisure to bestow on your son, even if she has the inclination," I remarked, by way of appeasing, though without effect, the angry lady as

we walked side by side towards her own house, and then and there parted.

I had heard and seen something of the time to which Mrs. Charles referred, as I had always been on terms of friendly intimacy at "Castleford House," and was well acquainted with all the members of the Primrose family, besides some of its juvenile inmates, amongst whom Rhoda Selby had always been a first favourite, both with Dr. Grey and myself. I had certainly at the time believed in the existence of something like an attachment between the two young people, then so entirely thrown together as Rhoda and Ralph were those Summer holidays; but as they were both at the time utterly without means of their own, of course it would have been madness on Ralph's part to propose to Rhoda then and there. Yet if they really still liked each other, and neither of them had formed any other attachment in the long interval since they

last met, I could not see anything to prevent a happy renewal of their acquaintance and love passages, if it pleased them to revert to the past in that way.

No doubt Mrs. Charles would be furious at her son's marrying, whenever the time came, but as it must arrive in due course of events, perhaps the sooner the better. I confess, for my own part, I was glad to hear that two such interesting and deserving young people might, if it pleased them, be made happy at last. Ralph was now in prosperity, and poor Rhoda in adversity, so they might be fated to meet at that especial time, and thus meeting, all no doubt would be well with them.

CHAPTER V.

THUS Rhoda Selby came back to Castleford after her long absence, but not as a guest to her old friends.

I found, from the Miss Primroses, that their pressing invitation had been declined, most gratefully on Rhoda's part, she assigning as a reason her young brother's very uncertain state of health, and saying she should feel more comfortable in a small lodging with him alone, if her kind friends would look out for, and engage, such an abode for them. Rhoda said, in conclusion, that they might only require it for a few weeks, but she was anxious to give her brother the benefit of an entire change during the Summer months, and herself

the great pleasure of passing them near her old friends, the Miss Primroses.

When Mrs. Charles heard of this arrangement she was quite as angry and dissatisfied as when she anticipated the Selbys' visit to her sisters-in-law.

As I was an old acquaintance, and well known to all parties, she often made me the unwilling recipient of her numerous complaints about imaginary injuries. In this case she came to my house to express her opinion that Miss Rhoda went into lodgings that she might be more at liberty to receive her son, and renew her manœuvres for ensnaring him more effectually than would be possible in his aunts' house and in their presence. To all these suppositions of evil nothing could be urged that seemed in any way to appease the wrathful suspicions of the irate little woman.

Things went their course, however, unmindful of Mrs. Charles Primrose's troubled state of mind, and at the appointed time

Rhoda took possession of the tidy, pleasant lodgings on the outskirts of the town that the two old ladies had looked at and engaged for her and her brother at the stipulated sum, making, I believe, some kindly little arrangement of their own with the landlady, whom they knew well, as to attendance, and certain little comforts which were to be supplied *(sub rosâ)* at their own expense. Thus, as I have said, Rhoda came amongst her old friends again, but not alone, for she brought this brother, of whom we knew nothing and had heard so little, with her.

I have as yet said nothing about Paul Selby, for Rhoda hardly ever spoke of him, and to the Miss Primroses he was an utter stranger. Mary and Martha were the first to go and call on their newly-arrived relatives, and after their visit to Rhoda they came to me. Of course, I made many inquiries after my former favourite, Rhoda. Neither of the ladies

looked happy or in good spirits, as I had expected on the return of the girl they had loved so well, and Miss Primrose answered quietly,

"Oh, yes, Rhoda is pretty well, but she is sadly altered; you can see she has had a great deal of trouble since she left us."

Then Martha observed drily,

"Yes, and I fear she is likely to have a great deal more."

"Indeed! I am concerned to hear it; but in what particular way do you mean?" asked I.

"We may as well speak out," said Miss Mary, with a tremulous shake in her voice; then continuing with evident determination—"Why, poor Rhoda's brother is——"

"A monster!" said Miss Martha.

"No, not so bad as that," returned Mary, "but most unfortunate in his appearance, and, I fear, in his temper. I hardly know whether the boy is in his proper senses."

I was horror-struck at this intimation, and only wondered that nothing of the real state of the case had been known before.

"Oh," said Martha, "Rhoda does not think much about poor Paul's deformity. I have heard her say he was short for his age, and that he had a very severe fever in his childhood, which stopped his growth, and made him irritable at times; but I imagine he has grown worse, and becomes more crooked in mind and body as he grows older, but the girl seems very tender to him, and the boy appears to cling to his sister."

"Shall I go to see them?" I asked, as the Miss Primroses rose up to depart. "Perhaps Rhoda may not like to exhibit her brother's infirmity to those not connected with them."

"You need have no fears on that account; you know Rhoda's great simplicity of character—that she would never wish to conceal any fact, and one which must

become known in time, and also you know the strong decision of her mind. She will take this burden on herself of the unhappy boy's blighted existence, and make it, I fear, her own by sharing his lot."

The next day I prepared, with a trembling heart, to go and see Rhoda, and make acquaintance, if possible, with this unfortunate brother, when my husband came in and told me he had already been, at Rhoda's request, to see the boy.

"I met her," said Dr. Grey, "at the Miss Primroses'. She was nice and pleasant, as usual, and, as she was going away, she said she rather wanted me to see her brother professionally, as he seemed much upset with the unwonted fatigue of a long journey, and was altogether out of sorts, mind and body. And then, turning to the old ladies, she said she was afraid Paul had not given them a very friendly reception, or done himself justice in their eyes, as he was really so irritable after the

railway travelling that he could not control his temper; after which she added,

"'And perhaps, Dr. Grey, you may have heard that my dear young brother is slightly deformed and in some degree crippled, and as he is highly sensitive and nervous, you may imagine there is every excuse to be made for him, and I am sure my dear and excellent friends have already granted their pardon to poor Paul.'

"Poor Rhoda," said my husband, "it was pitiable to see her plead for and ask such indulgence to be shown towards the poor boy on account of the heavy visitation with which he has been afflicted."

Then I asked my husband what he thought of the boy, and if his case was one of hopeless, helpless deformity. Dr. Grey's answer was quick and decided.

"Paul Selby will never be other than he is now; his growth has been stunted by intense disease in childhood, and the only part about him which has increased since

the time of his terrible illness is his head. His features are not ill-formed, or bad, but must look pinched at all times, and I observed, when under the influence of pain or ill-temper, they undergo a singular contraction, and that the peculiar malign expression of his eyes at those times does indeed give one the impression of some uncanny monster, as poor Martha Primrose, in her horror, called him."

Then I hazarded a question as to the youth's mental faculties, and I was told that he seemed naturally quick and clever, but it was impossible to form an opinion of his state of mind from one visit. My husband summed up by saying,

"As far as I can at present judge, Paul Selby's case seems to illustrate the doctrine of the duality of the brain, and from thence of mind also, in which I firmly believe. I am told he will compose a very artistic sketch, and he will bring it to a certain pitch of perfection; he will then introduce

all sorts of grotesque and irrelevant objects. The boy is a psychological study. I imagine one half of the brain is diseased from the effects of former illness, the other remains in its normal condition—thus his moods vary with the most perplexing contrariety. Only, I am told, to his sweet sister he seldom or never varies."

"But how is it she has seemed hitherto so little depressed at the boy's sad state? I call him boy, but what age is he really?"

"Rhoda says he is eighteen, and for many years their mother seemed to have hoped that some mysterious change would suddenly take place, and restore the boy to health and strength, if not to symmetry of body and mind. From what Rhoda tells me, the poor woman appears to have doted on her poor deformed child to such a degree that for many years neither she nor Rhoda would allow themselves to see him as he

really was; and Rhoda says it was only about four years ago, when she went home, after spending some of her holidays in the school-house, that she began to perceive how sad and hopeless a case was that of her brother. However, I think I can help to ease the irritability of the diseased portion or hemisphere of the brain, though not, I fear, to restore it, so as to act in constant unison with its better half."

That afternoon I went to Rhoda, rather dreading the first impression of her brother's appearance. I found both the young people in their pretty little drawing-room upstairs, with the long windows opening on to a little balcony filled with early flowers (it was the month of May, and a real May day), and commanding a charming view of the open heath and wide moors beyond which abutted on our town. Rhoda was standing before her easel, on which a half-finished picture in oils was

placed, and, seemingly, was occupied in arranging it in the best light, but not actually at work on it, only preparing for future employment.

The boy lay on a couch close by; he was enveloped in a large, light sort of cloak that concealed the deformity of his figure and want of height; his head, of unusual size, was half buried in the soft cushion that supported him, and he looked tranquilly on at his sister's proceedings with a languid gaze of approbation and a very serene expression of countenance, so that I could see nothing unpleasant or repulsive in his features.

I was affectionately received by Rhoda, and then the boy held out an emaciated hand to me without rising, but saying,

"I am very glad to see you, Mrs. Grey, for I am feeling so thankful to Dr. Grey for his kind and clever prescription; do, please, thank him from me for giving me ease both in body and mind."

There was something very sad to me in the poor boy's plaintive accents and expression of gratitude for the little cessation of bodily restlessness and mental irritation, but I knew so well the relief could be but temporary; nevertheless, I was glad that he could enjoy comparative intervals of comfort, and tried to improve the occasion by talking to him on various subjects; that of painting seemed to be the most interesting; he was evidently intended, like his father, for an artist, but the design of Nature had been nipped in the bud before it had had time to expand.

"You see," said he, showing me some rough sketches, "I have the idea in my head at the beginning, but, alas! before I can fully develope my intentions, a something comes between me and my work and spoils the whole conception."

I saw what he meant; there was a strange jumble of ideas in his drawings, as if some mocking imp had seized his pencil,

before he had finished his sketch, and then filled the paper or canvas with crude wild images and fantastic creations.

Rhoda came and sat down by us on Paul's sofa, passing her hand caressingly through his hair, that was his one beauty —soft, silky, and abundant, and a rich golden brown. Poor boy! it was sad to think upon his shadowed life, and with a foreboding that another must be enveloped in the gloom. I saw that Rhoda understood my thoughts, and she brightened up, hoping to relieve me of some of their sadness.

"We shall be very happy here, Paul and I; it is pleasant to feel amongst old and dear friends, and I am sure I do not know where else in the world we could look for them."

Then Paul said,

"We will stay here, Rhoda dear; in time people will get used to me, and if my temper improves, perhaps they will see I

am not altogether so hateful as I look."

Almost as Paul spoke, the door opened, and Ralph Primrose was announced. He came in so unexpectedly that Rhoda could not command the burning flush which rose to the very roots of her hair, and then suddenly subsided, leaving her pale as marble, with quivering lips and tearful eyes. The young man, too, was evidently moved as their hands met once more in a long, lingering clasp. But a cloud gathered over his brow as his eyes fell on the shrouded figure on the sofa, whilst the boy turned impatiently from his gaze, and muttered,

"We were so comfortable, and did not want strangers here!"

Then Ralph spoke low and quick, looking down on the poor pale face—

"I fear you are wearing yourself out. You must forgive my coming—I could not resist it when I once heard you were

actually here, and you must remember I am a cousin. Oh! how long it is since we made our compact of friendship! Have you forgotten it, Rhoda?"

No, it was very certain that the girl had forgotten nothing of those happy past days, but it was all changed since then to Rhoda's perceptions; they had both then been like happy, careless children, taking pleasure as it came, and amusing themselves together through the long blissful Summer holiday. They were both at that time equally destitute of this world's goods, though Ralph's prospects (thanks to the Miss Primroses' liberality) were good, and Rhoda had her own little store of talents and accomplishments to draw upon for future independence. But whilst Ralph Primrose had risen in the world, and now stood before her an independent, prosperous man, she had been going down, and, moreover, she had now a heavy burden attached to her in that helpless youth,

whom she had promised her mother never to forsake or leave to his own wretched lot in life. So poor Rhoda, in the first joy of again meeting the one she had so longed and yearned to see and hear again, even in that moment, and with his kind looks and words of welcome ringing in her ears, felt utterly depressed and miserable, and as if they were farther apart than ever.

There was evidently mutual embarrassment in that meeting, so I rose to go. I thought the three young people would get on better without me. But Paul called out with an angry voice, and ominous kindling of the contracting eye, desiring me to remain, and Rhoda looked pleadingly at me, so I sat on for a few uneasy minutes, till Ralph, feeling his presence was unwelcome, said something about calling another day, when her brother would be better, and took his leave.

After that we could not resume the

pleasant thread of our discourse Paul looked gloomy, and at length went to sleep; and then, kissing poor Rhoda's sad pale face, I went away.

CHAPTER VI.

WHILST Rhoda's nearest friends were grieving over the untoward fate which had inflicted such an unfortunate relative upon her, the state of Rhoda's brother appeared to afford Mrs. Charles Primrose unqualified satisfaction. She looked upon all the circumstances of personal misery to the poor boy himself, and possible life-long slavery to his sister, only in the light of a very happy deliverance to herself from the daily dread of being superseded in her home supremacy by Rhoda's being installed in her place as her son's wife.

All fear now of her son's seeking such a connexion she declared was at an end; and

as for the girl herself, constantly looking upon her brother's deformity of body and obliquity of mind, she could hardly desire to run the risk of taking all these evils into another family, so she did wisely to shut herself up with him, and not obtrude their misfortunes upon other people.

Such were the comforting reflections of Mrs. Charles, which were duly promulgated amongst her friends. What were her son's ideas on the subject no one knew at that time; he looked sad enough when Rhoda and her brother were made the subject of discussion, as they could not fail to be in our little world of Castleford.

Rhoda, having been well known and very much liked when with the Miss Primroses, found no difficulty in procuring a good promise of pupils, after the Summer holidays, both for drawing and Italian lessons, as in those days it was much more difficult to get good masters for either in the country than it is now. Miss Selby,

too, might have had as much employment as a daily governess, or even as a permanent one, had her time been entirely at her own disposal. Paul Selby was very exacting in his demands on his sister's attention; he had always been a first consideration at home during his mother's lifetime, and his father, in spite of his numerous engagements, had, whilst he lived and was in tolerable health, been very devoted to his unfortunate son; he had taught him everything he knew, and as the boy had, by fits and starts, a wonderful craving for knowledge, he had in a way, with Rhoda's help, continued his education after his father's death.

But everything he did was, as it were, blurred and imperfect; he would read and study with avidity for days, then throw all his books aside and not open one for weeks; the same with drawing and poetry, for which he had a taste, and would begin clever and harmonious verses, and then finish with fearfully grotesque and

irrelevant ideas, spoiling the whole conception. Rhoda gave herself a complete holiday on her first arrival; she had been hard worked in every way before she left London, and, not being in immediate want of funds, sought no present employment; she gave all her time and attention to Paul, intent on making his sad life more cheerful, and taking advantage of the long Spring days to introduce him to all the pretty picturesque spots in the immediate neighbourhood. With the help of his crutch and Rhoda's arm, he could limp about, and, when they had found a pleasant resting-place, she would seat herself by him and read or work, or sketch for his or her own amusement, as the fancy prompted. Paul had an incipient talent also for carving, and with his little set of tools would give shape and existence to many of his strange imaginations, his performances in that way being more remarkable for their clever oddity than their beauty. Such as

they were, however, Paul found plenty of customers ready to take them, almost as quickly as he could produce them; but, like everything he did, he was most uncertain in respect to his work.

There was a large boys' school in the town, and after Paul's unique productions had once been seen, and it was found could be purchased, there was no end of demand on the boy's manufactures. These orders and offers came, in the first instance, through the Miss Primroses, to whom Rhoda had sent a few of Paul's strange efforts in carving entirely as curiosities, without any idea of selling them; but the matter of purchase having once been mentioned to Paul, he seized eagerly on the idea, and found much amusement for a time in seeing and bargaining with the boys themselves for his little carved wares. At times he received them graciously, and took an order for certain groups of animals or sticks with carved heads, or anything that

might be most in request amongst them; but he rarely executed the work as required, often finishing it up after his own fancy, and creating some nondescript of his imagination. Sometimes he would ask very high prices, at others almost gave the things away; sometimes he was very obliging to his customers, at others so savage, he looked more like a wild cat ready to spring at their throat—in fact, it was whispered that, on one occasion, he had flown at a big boy who had been very bullying and tiresome about some carved group of figures he wished to have executed according to his own design. In that case it was supposed Rhoda came to the rescue and parted the combatants; she was generally in the way, either when boys came to their house to negotiate a purchase, or when they were loitering about out of doors.

It was not always that the young customers found Paul in a mood to entertain

their applications at all, and he would then dismiss them with bitter and unpleasant remarks, not always, happily, quite audible, or quite comprehensible if they were so. Rhoda rather encouraged these little barterings, not on account of any gain they brought to her, as Paul's whole pleasure lay in the accumulation of the small sums they brought him, and of which he never either spent or gave away a penny. He pleased himself in counting over his hoards, and Rhoda was glad that he could find some little interest in this new amusement. Unamiable as this miserly mood might be, she felt sadly conscious that the poor boy was hardly in many instances a responsible being. Then occasionally he had wild fits of passionate weeping and lamentation over his own unfortunate fate; at those times Rhoda would often try to turn his benighted thoughts into a happier channel, by placing before him the brighter prospects of a future life. He would,

when calm, listen and seem soothed by all her gentle persuasions, and even talk as if he too could find balm and rest to his wounded spirit in her representations; then in another moment all would be changed—he would become irritable and fierce, and Rhoda dared say no more.

She had been rather surprised, soon after her arrival, by receiving a visit from Mrs. Charles Primrose. That lady, urged by intense curiosity to see and judge for herself the extent of Rhoda's domestic calamities, laid aside her animosity, and condescended to present herself at Rhoda's lodgings. Mrs. Charles was not doomed to disappointment; she found the brother and sister together in their little sitting-room upstairs, and bestowed a patronizing greeting on both.

Rhoda's was not a spirit to cherish unkind feelings, and in the lapse of years she had probably forgotten, and had certainly forgiven, any ill-will that she knew Mrs.

Charles Primrose felt, and too often exhibited, towards herself when they were living together in the Miss Primroses' house. At all events, she took the visit as a mark of kind attention, and responded to it accordingly. She had never thought it expedient to try and conceal her unfortunate brother's state either of mind or body; perhaps she hardly realised how the knowledge might by unkind people be used to her own disadvantage. She was herself aware that all poor Paul's misfortunes might be traced to the terrible illness with which he had been visited in early childhood, and in her pure and simple heart she could only feel that it gave him a certain claim upon the good feeling and forbearance of those who had been exempt from all such affliction. Rhoda, therefore, quietly named her brother to her visitor, and then began to talk the usual nothings that generally do duty for conversation in a morning call. Mrs. Charles answered

in turn, and said her say, but she was all the time burning with impatience to address the brother, and test the extent of his mental capacity. At length a pause came, and then she turned and graciously addressed the boy, saying,

"Well, Mr. Paul, and how do you like Castleford, and how do you amuse yourself?"

Paul, somewhat on his good behaviour, and having no previous knowledge of Mrs. Charles, answered,

"Ah! in various ways. Much as you and other people do, I suppose."

"I am glad to hear you have such a variety of amusements. May I ask what they are?" responded the lady, amiably.

"Well, I make a great deal of money for one thing," said the poor cripple, with something like pride in his tone.

"Indeed!" returned Mrs. Charles, turning to Rhoda. "That is news, if it is true!"

"Yes," said Rhoda, "he sells his little carvings, and the grammar-school boys are good customers."

Paul looked from one to the other, and then added,

"You know my father was an artist, and sold his pictures for ever so much. Now I hope to do the same one day."

"Indeed!" again echoed Mrs. Charles, with fresh astonishment. "Then are you an artist too?"

"Yes; and a poet too, in a way—am not I, Rhoda?"

"You can write pretty verses sometimes, dear," quietly answered the sister.

"Then you are going to write a poem, I suppose, and illustrate it, I daresay?" asked Mrs. Charles, condescendingly, adding, "And what will you call it?"

"Well, that remains to be considered," said Paul. "But perhaps you may think I might emulate Æsop, and call myself a second Æsop, and, on the strength of the

resemblance, write some fables in his style, and illustrate them in my own."

"A very pretty idea," said Mrs. Charles, patronizingly, "if you are clever enough to carry out the likeness; and you know he was said to be——"

"Yes, I know he was a hunchback, if that is what you were going to say; and I cannot think it very kind or civil of you," exclaimed the boy, with raised speech and kindling eyes, so that Rhoda interposed with some trite little observation, and Mrs. Charles, rather discomposed, as she had not thought of hazarding the comparison, took her leave.

Of course she improved upon the occasion, and told everyone what a dreadful imp Rhoda's brother was, and averred that, in addition to all his shortcomings and evil looks, he was half mad with pride and self-conceit.

The days went on, and sweet Summer

came again. Rhoda often walked with her brother down to the river-side, where there was a charming quiet nook formed by overhanging trees and shrubs, and plenty of soft fine turf, where she made a resting-place for herself and Paul. It was very near the town, and as their lodgings were on the outskirts, she found no difficulty in getting her brother there; he would amuse himself also with a fishing-rod and line, and Rhoda would sometimes take one also, to please the boy by her companionship in his amusement.

It happened that whilst sitting there one day, their retreat was unexpectedly invaded by Ralph Primrose, who, riding in that direction, had spied out the pair, and then, tying his horse's bridle to an overhanging bough, he came and sat down by Rhoda, whom he now so rarely met. There was no mistaking the glad glow which suffused her usually pale cheeks, and the soft,

pleased light that shone in her dark eyes, when she saw her old friend come, as it were, back to her, and as he observed—

"This is like one of the dear old sketching nooks we used to frequent in those happy Summer days when we spent our holidays together. Have you forgotten them?"

I do not think that Rhoda gave him much reason to suppose that she had forgotten that happy time or himself either, and Ralph for a time forgot everything but the dear delight of Rhoda's sweet society, till he was recalled to a painful sense of the proximity of the unfortunate being on the other side, who sat handling his rod, and casting angry, furtive glances at the intruder; whilst Rhoda dropped her rod, and turning her whole attention away from her brother, listened with pleased and rapt attention to the new-comer. It was seldom Paul's way to devour his wrongs in silence, so although for a time he sat still

and sullenly watched the pair, he at last began to call attention to himself by asking,

"Are we to sit here all the day, Rhoda? Now you do not care to fish any longer, if you have nothing more to do or say to me, I may as well walk home."

"Shall I help you?" asked Ralph, suddenly springing to his feet, saddened by a sight of the misshapen object glowering at him, and knowing it was Rhoda's brother.

"When I want help, I will ask for it," was the ungracious retort, as he continued —"Come, Rhoda, do not let strangers come between us; you have always helped me yourself since poor mamma went away."

The boy never at any time mentioned *death* as death—it was generally a departure with him. At this reminder poor Rhoda turned with infinite loving-kindness and compassion to her brother, saying gently,

"Yes, dear, to be sure I am quite ready to help you now. Give me your rod, and I will carry both yours and mine; and lean on me—you look tired."

"Oh, give me all the things to carry—do, Rhoda dear!" exclaimed Ralph, unable to resist the little term of endearment, as he saw the gentle girl stooping to her wretched brother and helping him up, even whilst she was encumbered with all their fishing-tackle.

Rhoda would willingly have yielded her burden to Ralph's care, but the wayward youth snatched his rod from Ralph's hand, exclaiming—

"No! no one but Rhoda shall ever meddle with my things. Now cannot you go your way, whilst we take ours? Surely you have disturbed our comfort enough for one day."

Ralph answered nothing to these incoherent reproaches; he only bent his head to Rhoda, saying in a whisper,

"Do tell me, is there nothing really that I can do in any way to help you?" looking at the brother.

Rhoda only shook her head, and raising her eyes, with their soft, grateful expression to his face, said very sadly,

"Nothing, thank you; there are some things in this world which nothing and no one *can* help."

And then they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

MY good old friends, the Miss Primroses, made themselves quite unhappy in witnessing all the sorrow and trouble that Rhoda's brother brought upon her, and was likely to entail in the future; but they were powerless to help either; as Rhoda had told Ralph there were some things that never *could* be mended—they could only be endured.

After they had been three or four months at Castleford, the schools returned, and Rhoda began to look out for her promised pupils, and the Miss Primroses undertook to find her as many as she could conveniently undertake, and pending

their inquiries, Rhoda remained passive herself.

She was very much altered within the last two years; though cheerful at times, all her natural brightness had deserted her; she looked like one who, tied down to a sad fate, resolves to do his best under it, but in so doing relinquishes all hope and expectation of better things. It was like the living body chained to the dead one, in Rhoda's being bound, as it were, for life to her wretched brother; she seemed to accept that as her future lot, and to bear it, for his sake, with what cheerfulness she could.

"Think of what poor Paul has to endure!" she would say, when her friends tried to persuade her that it was too much for her to bear, in taking the whole burden of his existence upon herself.

Martha Primrose grew rather indignant sometimes at Rhoda's self-immolation, and

declared it was perfectly unnecessary and absurd; Mrs. Charles, on the contrary, vehemently asserted it to be quite right, and that she could not do otherwise; Mary Primrose, with her keener feelings and power of sympathy, would confide to me her sentiments in regard both to Rhoda and Ralph. She used to say,

"Rhoda is devoted to Ralph; I saw that when I sent her home four years ago, poor girl! so quickly, and persuaded him not to speak to her before she went away. But now they have met again, and he worships the very ground she treads upon, and loves her the more for all her sweet self-sacrifice to that wretched brother; and now when he is quite independent, and can give her a happy home, he fears to ask her because of that little 'monster,' as Martha calls him; and also I can perceive that his foolish mother, with her jealous fears, has managed to excite a sort of doubt in his

mind whether, with such a specimen of family fatuity and deformity, they ought to marry. So really it is too sad to see two young people, so charming in themselves, and so well suited to each other, kept apart by these untoward circumstances."

I longed to say in answer, "Why don't you tell Ralph to ask Dr. Grey's opinion as to the eligibility of Ralph's marrying Rhoda?" but of course I left that to themselves. I saw that the lovers, as they most undoubtedly were, could not resist the delight of meeting whenever an opportunity occurred, but the great obstacle to such brief seasons of enjoyment arose from the fact of Paul's increasing horror of and dislike to Ralph Primrose. He saw and knew that he had a formidable rival in the good-looking, pleasant-mannered young man, who hovered about his pretty sister wherever she went, and who was received by her with such glad looks. Ralph, on his

part, no doubt, began to dislike and dread the moody, sullen cripple, who, whenever he appeared, seemed to turn into a very demon of deformity of mind as well as body—indeed, no one could blind himself to the fact that they were one and all most miserable.

At length it chanced that Ralph, finding himself alone with Dr. Grey, after a few friends had been dining at our house, took occasion to speak on the subject nearest his heart, and was greatly comforted and enlightened by the opinion expressed and the advice given by my husband.

It was not long after that that Ralph wrote to Rhoda; he never could count on finding her at home or alone, so thought it best and safest to write and urge her to become his wife, and put an end to a state of things that was making them both most miserable, and was, he said, on his part, quite unfitting him for the many business

cares with which he was overwhelmed. Then he solemnly promised to provide for Paul, and to place him where he would have every care and attention, and be quite as happy as his state admitted, and perhaps better managed than under her too indulgent sway.

That poor Rhoda was sorely tempted by this appeal, to which her heart responded so tenderly, need not be said; but she looked at her miserable, misshapen brother, who clung to her alone in the wide world, and who she thought ought not to be shut up and treated as if he were really insane; and then she recollected her solemn promise to her dying mother, and she cast the bright prospect aside, and turning from the flowery path offered to her, chose the thorny one she believed to have been meted out to her by unerring wisdom. So she wrote an answer to Ralph, candidly owning that she returned his love, but at the

same time must reject it. Whilst her wretched brother lived her place was at his side, and she had promised her dead mother never to leave him.

Rhoda was perfectly calm and decided in her refusal, and Ralph knew and felt that all was at an end between them. Neither Rhoda nor Ralph ever contemplated the possibility of Rhoda's bringing her brother with her to his house; the boy's ungovernable temper would have precluded all such desire on her part, and on Ralph's, he never could have brought himself to endure the presence of so unwelcome an inmate.

So it was all over, and sad enough the future looked to Rhoda, as well as to her lover. Perhaps up to this time Rhoda might almost unconsciously have cherished a hope that Ralph would have offered to relieve her of her anxious charge by taking her brother as well as herself to share

his home, hardly perhaps realizing what a home would be to any man with Paul as an uncontrolled member of his household.

Ralph, probably, on his part, little doubted but that Rhoda's love for himself would induce her to part from her brother, when assured that he would be well cared for. All chance of any happier change being at an end, Rhoda accepted the pupils that offered themselves for instruction in drawing, but would not undertake more that year. Her landlady was very obliging in allowing her the use of a large room on the ground-floor, where the pupils assembled twice a week for a couple of hours, and where Rhoda found it more convenient to teach them together than to visit their houses separately; in fact, with Paul to look after, she would have found it impossible.

It was then just the beginning of September, and the days were unusually warm, almost sultry, so, as Paul always complain-

ed much of, and suffered both in body and mind from, great heat, Rhoda used to take him with her to their shady nook by the river, where she had established both a table and chair; and on the days when she was engaged with her pupils, she was in the habit of leaving Paul to his own devices, which, now he was quite at home in the place, he did not in the least object to; so she used to settle him, with all he wanted within reach, and then would come again for him after her lesson was ended —in fact, the distance was so little that Paul could with his crutch and a stick, instead of his sister's arm, make his way home, or anywhere else within a certain distance.

It happened, one very calm, warm morning, that a short time before her pupils were expected, she went down to their shady retreat by the river, carrying his rod for him, and also his carving tools, in

case he tired of fishing. Rhoda was glad to get the boy out and away from home, for he had had rather a stormy interview with one of his schoolboy customers ; they had quarrelled vehemently about some figure Paul had engaged to finish during the holidays, but had entirely neglected the order, and then offered another in its stead. The boy had accepted the said toy, but they had farther disagreed as to price, so Paul retained the article until it was duly paid for ; the boy had called Paul a "hunchbacked Jew," and had received from him as many compliments in return —in fact, the poor cripple had been grievously outraged, and his temper required rest and a cool retreat to allow it to calm down.

Just as Rhoda was leaving her brother, and stooping down to arrange everything on the little table, the boy suddenly threw his long wasted arms round her neck, and

drawing her soft cheek to his own poor pinched face, kissed her, and burst into tears, saying, with passionate sobs,

"Oh! my Rhoda, my darling, you are an angel to me, and I am a demon myself, both in shape and in temper! Oh! my darling, do you think our mother in heaven sees us, and knows that you will never forsake your poor Paul?"

These bursts of tenderness and grief were not uncommon, but they always affected Rhoda deeply. She soothed the boy, and left him calmly arranging his rod for fishing; she promised to come back as soon as ever she could get away, and was hurrying up across the bit of heath that separated the plantation by the river-side from the house where she lived. She had hardly gone a dozen steps before she met Ralph Primrose; she half wondered to see him so near the shady nook where they had often met before (to Paul's intense

and openly-expressed disgust and anger), but where of late, since Rhoda's refusal, he had never been.

"Come with me, Rhoda," he said, in a hurried, agitated manner. "I must speak to you now you are alone; our lives are too wretched—can nothing be done to mend this miserable state of things?"

"Nothing that I know of, Ralph, unless you can allow me to carry out my promise to my dying mother, and keep watch over my poor brother."

And then Rhoda looked anxiously in Ralph's face to see if there was any hope of her appeal being granted, for her whole heart clung to the desolate deformed boy; she knew he had no one on earth but herself to look to for kindness, and shuddered as she thought of his wretched, morbid temper amongst those who could only look upon him with aversion. Ralph, meanwhile, looked gloomy but determined;

he knew too well what his life would be saddled with such an incubus, and his wife's whole time and thoughts given up to her brother, or at least divided between them; he felt it could not be, and if he yielded then, he should have cause to regret his weakness every day of his life afterwards. He loved—nay, doted upon Rhoda, yet he was a plain, practical man, and could not enter into her feelings in regard to this brother, whom he could only regard in the light of a most wretched obstacle, both to her happiness and his own.

Then, with that steady matter-of-fact prevision which was natural to him, he looked into the future and saw Paul as an inmate of his home and domesticated with a possible family of young children, and trembled at the fearful picture. No, it never could be; every feeling of his nature revolted against such an association, and he answered,

"No, Rhoda, *that cannot* be; speak no more of it, dearest; you must see how repugnant it is to me to deny any wish of yours, but I believe what you desire would only entail misery on us all. Do, my dearest, best beloved, look on my plan with approval; your brother shall have every care and comfort."

"But without me he would be wretched!"

"Well, Rhoda, you think nothing of *my* wretchedness in comparison with that miserable boy, who seems to have been born only to cause trouble and sorrow to all around!"

"Never mind, Ralph," said poor Rhoda, hastily forcing back her tears and trying to appear calm; "I see you could not put up with him, even for my sake, so never mind —say no more; I shall never wish you to be troubled with him or me either, so good-bye. Do not let us be angry with each

other; we have different paths to tread in life—mine may not be an easy or pleasant one, but it is the one that is ordered for me. God bless you, dear Ralph. I must go; it is my drawing-day, and the children will be waiting for me."

"Always some one to take you away and to come between me and you," said Ralph, as Rhoda turned and gave him her hand in a parting clasp; he held it for a minute, then let it fall, and without another word turned and went his way, whilst Rhoda, ever bent on toilsome duty, went home with a sore heart and aching head to her expected pupils.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was late that evening before Rhoda went to call her brother home; she had been detained longer than she had at the time any idea of in her parting interview with Ralph, and when she came in she was in too great a state of perturbation to be able to attend at once to her pupils.

Now Rhoda was too conscientious a person to curtail their lesson for her own convenience or pleasure, so after she had calmed her mind and steadied her trembling hand, she set to work with her pupils and gave them their full time.

That time had exceeded by a full hour the usual period when she went for Paul, and she fully expected that he would get impatient, and manage to limp by himself home; or if he did not, as she had left her watch with Paul, he would know the hour, and expect her accordingly. She therefore tied on her bonnet—girls wore bonnets in those days—and went down quickly to the shady nook where she had left Paul, and still expected to find him; but the place was vacant, the chair and table were overthrown, and no symptom of the boy was anywhere about.

Rhoda's heart beat heavily as she thought what if any beggars or tramps from the town should have seen the helpless cripple sitting there, and attacked him to obtain the watch, or anything he might have in the way of money about him? But no, she soon espied her watch lying uninjured on the grass. There were marks of some

struggle, and, oh! terrible sight to Rhoda, the poor boy's crutch and stick lay close to the path. What could have become of him? Rhoda raised her voice and called aloud her brother's name, in an agony of apprehension, hoping he might have only strayed away, or lain down and gone to sleep.

If Paul Selby had been the most perfect and beautiful of God's creatures, Rhoda's heart could not have yearned more intensly for a sight of him than it did for one of that poor misshapen distorted form which represented her brother, and was associated in her mind with so many sweet thoughts of loving tenderness.

The voice of distress soon made itself heard far and near, and people came crowding about the poor girl, all offering advice or consolation to the best of their power. As soon as the tidings of Rhoda's trouble reached the good old sisters Primrose, they

came down to the shady nook, where the crowd was assembled, to wait the result of the search carrying on through that part of the plantation.

Then it was that Dr. Grey joined the agitated group, and finally succeeded in quieting the Miss Primroses, and sending them home, whilst he brought Rhoda at once to our house, and placed her under my care, whilst he took every possible means to trace the missing boy. Unlovely as he was in person and in mind, still all was forgotten, except that some misfortune had befallen the helpless creature, and that his sister was almost distracted at his unaccountable disappearance.

After every nook and corner near had been fully investigated, it was proposed to try the river. If they could not find the boy still living, they must search for him as dead. All that day and night their efforts proved fruitless, and poor Rhoda's

sleepless eyes looked drearily out upon another day. It was pouring with rain, the Summer heat was succeeded by a raw, chilly, dismal morning, which appeared to add still more to the gloomy depression that hung over the whole place.

In the midst of all this distress, Mrs. Charles Primrose appeared on the scene; she came down to our house on foot under the shelter of a gigantic umbrella, and having put that aside and divested herself of her cloak, she said she was come, if I would allow her to remain, to watch the proceedings at our house. She complained of her son's taciturnity on the subject, and expressed her own fervent hope that, now the river had been searched without success, the boy might be found alive. No doubt, she suggested, he had gone away in one of his mad fits, and he would be found when and where nobody expected. I gave the good lady all due credit for her anxiety on the

subject, well knowing that she considered the wretched Paul as her rock of safety to shelter her from the apprehension of her son marrying Rhoda, for she was entirely aware of and encouraged his determination never to admit the boy as an inmate of his house.

I pointed out to her the impossibility of such a cripple having been able to move away without the help of his crutch and stick, and how much more probable it was that he had in some way fallen into the river, which ran so close to where he was sitting when his sister left him.

"Oh, I don't think that at all probable; he was too careful of himself to go near enough to tumble in. Depend upon it, he is somewhere not far off, and he may turn up any day, and so I tell Ralph."

"And what does he say?" I asked, with sudden interest and curiosity.

"Just nothing at all. I have no patience with him—hating the boy as I know he did, and with very good reason; he looks as gloomy about all this fuss as if he was the dearest friend he had on earth."

"Well, we must make allowance for his feelings, which we all suspect in regard to Rhoda, and he knows how her affectionate heart must suffer."

"I know nothing about that," retorted Mrs. Charles, captiously. "We all know Miss Rhoda would be very glad to become Mrs. Ralph Primrose any day, and hoped to bring that piece of deformity and insanity into my son's house; happily that was coming it rather too strong even for him, and so he has thrown her over!"

I had to remind the amiable lady that Miss Selby was my guest, and in such trouble and sorrow that I could not listen to such remarks at that time. Mrs. Charles then declared that she was sorry

if I was vexed, but she was a person who always spoke her mind, and could not call crooked things straight, or sour ones sweet, and she could not see that Paul Selby's escapade in hiding himself from his sister made him a whit more commendable in any respect, or her infatuation in regard to him less objectionable to sensible people."

As Mrs. Charles Primrose seemed a fixture, and as, under the excitement that generally prevailed, Dr. Grey's house was by no means his castle that dismal day, I submitted to the infliction with the best grace I could, only telling her I must leave her for a time to go and sit with poor Rhoda in her room, for she was in such a distressed state of mind I did not like to leave her. As I was leaving the room, Mrs. Charles called out,

"And pray, Mrs. Grey, tell Miss Rhoda that even if her precious brother is never

found, we shall all consider him living still, and she ought to be prepared to see him come home any day."

"That is hardly likely," said I. "A poor youth, afflicted as he is in various ways, could never hide himself for long; so, if he is not found soon, I, for one, shall always believe he lies there," looking out of the window towards the river, which ran through our grounds at the bottom of the lawn.

The words were hardly out of my mouth, when I heard the hoarse murmur of an approaching crowd, and before I could ring and inquire, my husband came hastily into the room.

Hardly observing Mrs. Charles, he came up to me, saying,

"Go upstairs at once to poor Rhoda and keep her quiet—do not let her go to the window—they are bringing the poor boy here."

"*Here!*" I exclaimed, as I lingered for a moment to hear more.

"Yes—I thought it best; we could not let her go to the lodging with him."

"And—he?"

"Drowned, as we supposed."

That was enough; I hastened up to the poor girl to break the sad news as gently as I could, for she loved her brother dearly, and never looked upon him as the rest of the world did. She heard me with whitening lips and cheeks, and then said,

"I knew it must be so! Oh! my darling, my darling!"

I let her weep undisturbed, and stole away, till the first burst of her grief should have subsided, for it was too soon to tell her that early death was a blessing to one who could have no real enjoyment of life. All that would come in time; for the present I knew she was best alone. I then went to make preparations to receive poor

Rhoda's dead brother, and to keep the house as quiet as was possible under the sad circumstances. Dr. Grey had, however, seen to all the miserable details, and had taken care to keep everything most distressing as far from Rhoda, and from me also, as was possible. He told me they had taken the poor boy to a detached building close by the house, till the impending inquest should be over. He looked very grave, and even more moved than I could have fancied possible, considering how little we cared for the deceased, and how much he was in the habit of seeing scenes of distress. Something of this I said to rouse him from the state of deep abstraction into which he had fallen. He started from his reverie, and observed,

"Yes, it is very awful for poor Rhoda, but if it had been a pure accident, I do not know that there would have been

much cause for lamentation in the case."

"Do you mean it is not an accident?"

"I fear not; there are marks of violence as well as drowning, and in that case my concern is more for the living than the dead."

It was a horrible suggestion, but *who* could have done the deed? At that inquiry we all paused, for who could have had any interest in destroying the wretched, helpless creature?

I will not dwell at length upon the miserable history of the next few days. The inquest was held, and Dr. Grey was the chief medical witness, but it was too obvious that the poor cripple had met with foul play. There were marks of a severe blow under the ear, and in the long bony fingers there were tightly clutched some threads of fair hair, showing that there had been a struggle before he was cast

into the river. But in vain did they search for any light in the dismal case.

Rhoda was privately interrogated, as was necessary, about the time and manner of leaving him, as she was the last person who had seen the boy alive. It was a most painful examination, though conducted with every possible consideration to the poor girl's feelings. In the course of it she had to mention her parting interview with Ralph Primrose. He was certainly *near* the fatal spot, but never was there—that she vehemently declared.

"To your knowledge," said one of the jury.

Rhoda looked up with a wild, defiant gaze at the speaker, and asked what he meant.

"Oh! nothing, nothing," returned the man.

"Then," said poor Rhoda, with quivering lips, "you should not speak with-

out meaning at such an awful time."

She could bear no more, and in mercy they took her away. The most searching examination could find nothing tending to fix the crime on any particular person. Ralph was present at the inquest, and said he had met and talked with Miss Selby after she had left her brother alive and well. He never went to the place at all, and if he had not chanced to meet her crossing the heath, should not have seen her at all; he had no intention of going to the nook whatever, and after they parted he went up the High Street on business of his own.

Rhoda wildly suggested that some tramps had been seen about the town, but when brought before the magistrate they were able to account for their proceedings during the whole of that day. They then tried what could be made of the few light hairs clutched in the dead youth's hands. They

were a very common shade, so that they resembled the hairs on the heads of many of those then present.

"You have light hair, Primrose, and so have I," said a gentleman present.

Ralph smiled grimly as he passed his hand through his own abundant *chevelure* and replied,

"Yes; and I think it would be difficult to say to which head those hairs belong; but I think we must look farther."

"So do I," responded Ralph's friend, cheerfully. And after a long and patient examination an open verdict had to be returned—"Found drowned, but by what means unknown."

Unsatisfactory as everything was, it was a great relief when all was over, and poor Paul laid in his untimely grave. No one but his sister could really lament his loss, and she grieved with a depth of affection that was to most people quite incompre-

hensible. Her great, openly-avowed sorrow was for the manner in which his life had been cut short, without a moment's warning or preparation, and perhaps with angry thoughts in his heart, and evil words on his lips; but still the poor girl pleaded, with moist eyes and faltering speech,

"After all, my poor darling, dear and affectionate as he was to me, had not, I think, a capacity for general love—I mean to people he casually saw. Will he be judged for that, or for his many other infirmities?"

"You need not ask, Rhoda; you have often felt he was not accountable like many others, and you may rest assured he has passed into the hands of One who will never seek to 'reap where he has not strawed.' No, dear child, be happy about his present state. We may well believe he would not return to us if he could."

Rhoda was determined to attend her

poor boy's funeral, and then and there she caught a chill, which, combined with extreme anxiety and depression of mind, and all attendant excitement, terminated at length in a severe feverish attack. She was seriously ill for some weeks, but her youth and naturally good constitution carried her safely through; and, I may add, also the good nursing and medical attendance which she had at our house; and very glad were both Dr. Grey and I to have the poor stricken sufferer with us. At length, somewhere in the month of October, she began to recover, and by the end of the month was quite herself again. Her illness had done her good in every way, and she rose up from it, as it were, with new life and fresh power.

CHAPTER IX.

AS soon as Rhoda was pronounced fit to receive company, the Miss Primroses begged to be allowed to see her. Rhoda turned rather pale at the request, and yielded with an evident effort to their proposed visit. The good ladies came, and Rhoda met them with all kindness, but there was a certain constraint in her manner, and when they pressed her to come and stay with them she hastily declined, saying she was going almost immediately to accept a situation that Dr. Grey had been kind enough to procure for her, and asking them to excuse her going

to see them before she left Castleford. I saw the kind women were a little surprised as well as hurt at Rhoda's coolness, and when we were alone I could not resist asking her why she had been so distant to her old friends; she seemed startled at the question, and said if her manner had appeared so it was quite unintentional, for there were no people she liked better or esteemed more highly, and begged, if I had the opportunity, that I would assure them of it. She was going to leave us very shortly then for the situation she had alluded to. A very charming widow lady of fortune in the neighbourhood, who was in delicate health, was going to spend the Winter in Italy, and having no near relations to go with her, asked Dr. Grey to find a young lady-companion, adding she knew she could trust him in such a difficult search. Rhoda was recommended to Lady Leslie, and, after an interview, the two were

mutually pleased, so that affair was settled to the entire satisfaction of Rhoda and her friends.

Now as the time of her departure drew near, in the dark hours one evening, for the first time, came Ralph Primrose to our house. He was, of course, admitted; Rhoda was upstairs packing, and I went and told her who was below and wanted to see her. I had hoped, for some little time, that everything now would be happily and safely settled, and that before Rhoda went abroad she would be engaged to Ralph Primrose; I knew she would not marry so soon, but hoped she would be on her road to be so on her return. To my surprise, however, Rhoda came hastily up to me with a pale face and quivering lips, and whispered,

"Never, dear Mrs. Grey, I *never* wish to see Ralph Primrose again; his last words, when we met, were words of scorn and

hatred to my poor darling!—God knows what his feelings might have been to him! I do not want to judge him, but tell him we can meet no more."

It was not a pleasant message to take to the expectant young man, and he looked as if he had received a heavy blow when I delivered it. I tried to soften the matter by saying that Rhoda's feelings were still so sore that she could not bear to see anyone who had treated her brother with unkindness. Upon my saying that, Ralph looked angry, and said she was unreasonable, and had no feeling for anyone but that wretched—— And then he stopped abruptly, as if some painful recollection came across him, and forbade his saying more. But he asked no more to see Rhoda, and immediately after took his leave.

The next day Rhoda left us.

It was a year and a half before we saw

Rhoda again. She remained as Lady Leslie's companion after she returned to England, and from her letters she seemed fairly happy and contented.

I had begged Rhoda to pay us a visit whenever she could be spared, and as Lady Leslie was going for some weeks into Scotland to visit a married niece, Rhoda took the opportunity of coming to see us and her old friends at Castleford.

It was Summer-time again—two years since the eventful one when she brought her young brother to find an untimely grave there. We found Rhoda much altered and improved in every way since she left us. She had seen more of the world than it had ever fallen to her lot to see in the previous years of her life, and the knowledge had been of great advantage to her. Her mind had become enlarged, and her judgment strengthened

and more discriminative, whilst her appearance and manners had acquired polish and refinement, without losing anything of their natural candour and simplicity. She was looking very pretty, too, and had quite regained her accustomed cheerfulness, whilst her whole appearance was considerably set off by an improved, though quiet style of dress. But with all these advantages she was the same Rhoda—no ways spoilt or made conceited and self-sufficient by coming back amongst her old friends in a better position.

She laughed when complimented by some of her former acquaintances on her advancement in the world, and reminded them that she still occupied a very dependent position as a "lady's companion."

"Nevertheless," said she, "it is a most pleasant one, and if I do wear chains, I am never made to feel them, they are very light ones; besides, I can drop them at

pleasure, though it is very certain I must put on others, if I mean to earn what is needful to existence; and I prefer the known, and have no desire to make any experiment into the unknown; I am very well satisfied to remain as I am."

CHAPTER IX.

TIME passed pleasantly away whilst Rhoda was our guest. The Miss Primroses came to see her, and found her again the grateful and affectionate girl that they had so kindly helped in her day of need. Whatever had been the cause of Rhoda's temporary change of manner to them, it had quite passed away, and the good women attributed it all to the wretched state of her mind after her brother's death, and her own severe illness.

Still she carefully avoided all reference to Ralph Primrose, and seemed always in-

clined to turn a deaf ear if his name happened to occur in the course of conversation. I wondered she had not forgotten or forgiven whatever might have been the cause of her displeasure in his declining to take Paul to his own home, whilst he had offered to provide so liberally for him elsewhere. Now she had been mixing so much more in the world, she might be able to better understand his feelings on the subject, and at least give him the benefit of a more lenient judgment.

Ralph was absent when Rhoda came to us. He was visiting his old friends in Scotland, and there was a whisper afloat that he was likely to seek a wife there—report said the young lady was very pretty, an only child, and her father supposed to be rich.

Some one spoke of this rumour in Rhoda's presence. If she heard she took no notice. So I ventured to ask her after-

wards if she had heard the conversation.

"Yes," said Rhoda; "it is nothing to me; but it is fortunate for Mr. Primrose that there can be no brother in the case of whom he could be ashamed or afraid."

"That is not like you, Rhoda," said I, taking an older woman's privilege with my young friend.

Rhoda was not offended, she only said, "Dear Mrs. Grey, do not be vexed with me. There are some points on which I cannot be amiable and charitable, and this is one of them." And then we changed the subject.

Ralph came back in time to see Rhoda before she left us. She was very cold and distant to him; but when she could do so unobserved, I saw her gazing at him with a fixed intensity of look that seemed as if it wanted to read every veiled thought of his heart. She appeared, when obliged to address him, to do so more in toleration, be-

cause of his being a guest in our house, than from any inclination on her own part. I began to think there was not much truth in the report of his engagement and approaching marriage, for I saw him look at Rhoda with the old devotion, and could perceive he thought her more charming than ever. Still it was utterly impossible for him to advance one step nearer with such an icy barrier as she had chosen to place between them. He became, in consequence, very sad and gloomy, and looked miserable enough to soften the heart of any woman who had once loved him.

In the midst of all this discomfort a strange event occurred. There had been a good deal of illness in the town, and my husband had had more than enough on his hands in the patients that daily called upon him for advice. We both found a very useful ally in the nursing, superintending, and visiting way in Rhoda, who was de-

lighted to be of use to us and the poor people around, and who never appeared tired, nor feared anything like infection; having, she said, had her full share of fever long before, she could now go amongst those who were similarly affected.

She was resting herself one day when Dr. Grey came home and said,

"Rhoda, I want you to go and see a young patient of mine, he has been very ill, and, I fear, is hardly likely to get well again; he told me he wanted to see Miss Selby, and begged me to bring her the next day."

Rhoda gladly promised compliance, and my husband took her with him on his morning round.

They found the boy, who was the son of a rich tradesman in the town, propped up in bed and looking very ill; he asked his mother and nurse to leave him alone with Miss Selby and Dr. Grey.

As soon as they were gone, the boy put his hand under his pillow and brought out a small parcel, and, opening it, handed the contents to Rhoda and asked her if she remembered it.

Rhoda immediately recognized one of poor Paul's strangest devices in the carving way, and looked at it with affectionate interest.

"Yes, you know it as well as I do, Miss Selby; don't hate me, for I am dying, and have never had a happy moment since."

Rhoda looked up wondering and thinking the boy was delirious, for she was not surprised at seeing the little carved figure, knowing how all the boys at the grammar-school had bought them, and believed that this young Turner was one of them; so she looked inquiringly at Dr. Grey, and he encouraged the boy to go on, and he confided the following story to them:

He was the boy who had quarrelled with

Paul about the toy he then produced, and they had parted with mutual ill-will. It was a half holiday, and he had settled to go fishing in the river with another boy; when he got to the appointed place his friend was not there, so he sauntered on, and, unhappily, came upon the spot where Rhoda had left Paul. Their old disagreement was renewed, and young Turner, to vex Paul, took up the small object of dispute, the carved figure, which was placed in the little box of tools on the table, and put it in his pocket, with a very provoking grimace at the little cripple. This enraged Paul beyond all bounds, and, giving a savage yell, he flew at Turner's throat like a wild cat, and, clutching hold of his hair, clung to him. Turner, enraged and half terrified at this assault, clenched his fist (he was a big, powerful boy) and dealt such a blow on the side of Paul's head and jaw, that he quickly loosened his hold, and

being then pushed away by Turner, fell, and rolled backwards into the water, and sank immediately. Young Turner, terrified at what he had done, fled from the spot, not daring to reveal it, for fear of being taken up for murder, and, as he said, he had never known a moment's peace or a happy day since.

He declared he was perfectly innocent of all intention of killing the cripple, and that what he did was in self-defence. It was a sad story, but with all its wretched details, it seemed to have afforded infinite relief to Rhoda, and a dark cloud appeared to have been lifted off her mind. She wept over it, at the recollection of Paul's impotent rage, but knew he was not accountable for it; and then she suddenly felt that perhaps there might have been some excuse for Ralph in refusing to admit so uncertain a being into his house as one of his own family. There was comfort in the thought, and Rhoda

felt that, now all was clear to her, she might be inclined to speak once more to her old friend Ralph.

It is needless to say that, with the intervention of friends, the desired opportunity was not long in presenting itself. Ralph was easily appeased, for he, too, had been very miserable, and perhaps he had sought a little diversion and consolation when in Scotland from a mild flirtation with the young heiress. It had gone no further —never was likely to do so; for before a week had passed over since Rhoda had heard young Turner's statement, she had not only spoken again in the old way to Ralph, but had listened to him, and consented to become his wife.

Mrs. Charles was obliged to vacate; but as her son provided her with a very comfortable home, she is as happy there as her disposition and circumstances will permit. She even condescended to grace her son's

marriage with her presence; and Ralph, in seeing Rhoda at length as his wife, has learnt even to think leniently of Rhoda's Brother!

THE END.

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